

ETHIOPIA'S AMAZONS

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

Journal of Professional Adventurers



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SPAIN'S
~~FOREIGN~~
LEGION

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

FEBRUARY 1988



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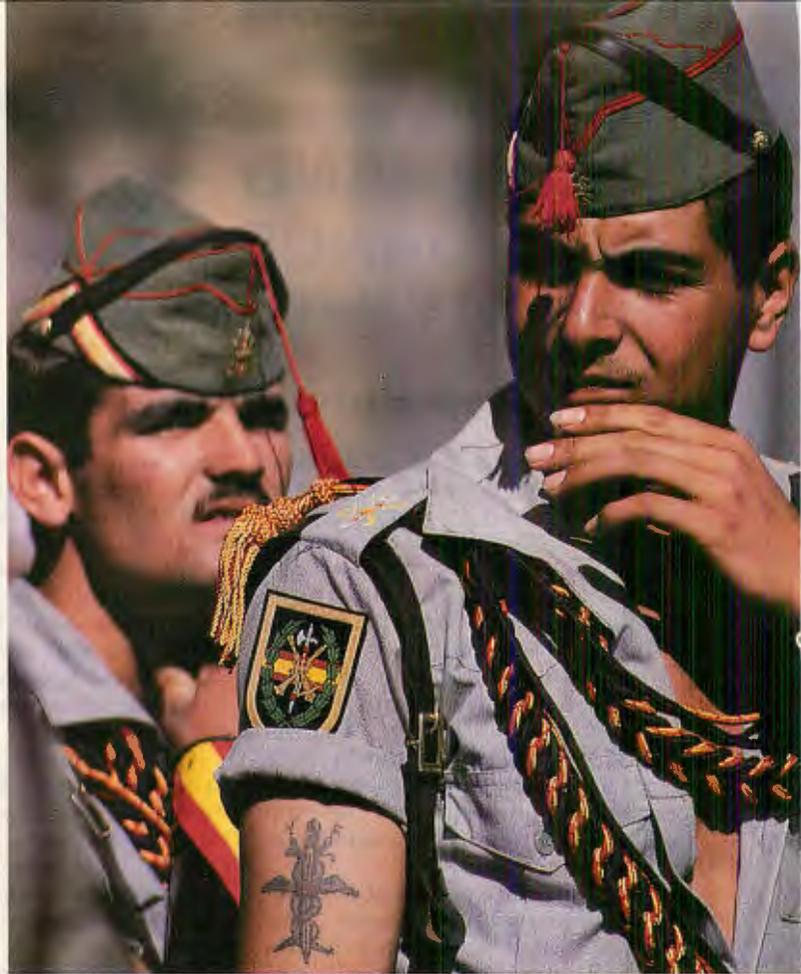
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COVER: Spanish Foreign Legion's crack drill team, *Escuadra de Gastadores* (literally translated as "Sapper Squadron") on parade at their base in Ronda, Spain. The Spanish government recently passed a law prohibiting foreigners from joining the Legion, marking the end of a colorful era in Spain's military history. Photo: Ron Hill

COVER INSET: The Eritrean people refuse to lay down their arms after more than 25 years of fighting Ethiopia's Soviet-backed government. Men, women and children are at the front fighting in this forgotten war. Join John Jameson for a tour of the trenches beginning on page 40. Photo: John Jameson

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COMMAND GUIDANCE

by Robert K. Brown



Public Access

While hiking back to my deer hunting camp in Colorado last year, I met a "good ole boy" who has been hunting the area for some 30 years. Over a cup of coffee, he told me that he had serious concerns that Americans are slowly being stripped of their right to hunt and fish in the vast areas of wilderness and prairie that belong to all of us. Over the years the amount of public land for hunting has diminished drastically. The problem isn't the land — it's still there. The problem is getting access to it.

And he made a couple of observations that really hit home: "The more difficult it becomes to gain access, the more hunters will give up their guns," he pointed out. "And equally important, they will not teach their children to shoot." This will result in an ever-decreasing number of Americans who have a vested interest in the Second Amendment, the right to keep and bear arms. And that's why SOF and I are getting involved in protecting the rights of American sportsmen to have access to public lands.

Access to public lands (National Forest, BLM lands, etc.) is often controlled by private citizens who own property bordering public land. More and more of these landholders with grazing leases are denying hunters and other outdoorsmen access to public land, even though they have no legal right to do so.

The problem has broad ramifications. Fewer hunters means fewer licenses sold, which translates into smaller budget dollars for state fish and game management. The out-

door manufacturing industry believes lack of access to land will lead to an ever-diminishing market for their products. Many retired people are simply unable to hike miles and miles to gain access to an area they should be able to drive to, so they will not use the land. Rural local economies suffer — fewer big game hunters means reduced revenues.

How serious is the problem? According to Andy Oldfield, three-time past chairman of Safari Club International and a gentleman not given to hyperbole, "The question of public access is an attack on the entire spectrum of outdoor sports."

Why would anyone want to keep you and me from hunting on our own land? Mostly, it comes down to money. Some landowners operate lucrative guide services and don't want hunters to have the freedom to hunt without paying for their services. Some landowners generate income by charging fees for admission to public land. I can't fault anyone for trying to generate extra income, but the fact is the land belongs to the American people, and anyone denying us access to it is on the wrong side of the fence.

What can we do? As always, the first step is raising public awareness about the issue. Look for an upcoming article in SOF exploring the entire issue. We'll report on which organizations are fighting for your rights and how you can get involved in the effort.

Today we're spreading the word. Tomorrow, with your help, we'll start opening gates and removing the fences that keep us off the lands we all own. ✕

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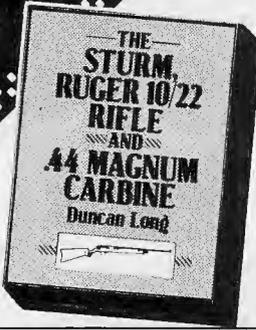


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by Duncan Long

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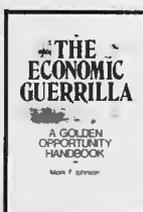
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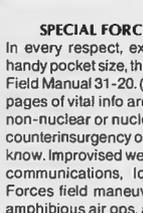
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MOSSBERG MISTAKES...

Sirs:

I have to point out a couple of technical errors in your article about the Mossberg M500 shotgun. In his article "Simply Reliable" in the December issue, Kevin Steele states that the M500 has a single action bar. I don't know where he got his M500, but every one that I've seen, and owned, has dual bars. He later states that the M500 is not available with rifle sights — again this is untrue.

Although I feel Mr. Steele should have done a little more homework before writing his article, I did enjoy the piece, because too many people write the Mossberg off as "just another cheapie." That's because they don't know the difference between cheap and inexpensive.

Neil Foster
Lancaster,
California

Kevin E. Steele, now a features editor with Guns & Ammo magazine, has this reply: "I'd like to apologize to readers of SOF and also Mossberg for several errors that appeared in my article 'Simply Reliable.' I'm particularly embarrassed since I'm fully aware of the correct information regarding the M500's twin operating bars and the availability of rifle-sighted barrels. I can't say how or why the incorrect information got into the piece, but I was obviously suffering from a lack of consciousness when I penned it. Though it's true that these things happen at times, it does little to assuage my guilt."



FLAK



OUR AIM ISN'T TRUE?...

Sirs:

As an SOF fan I was quite disappointed with your article "Showdown at Wounded Knee" [SOF, October '87].

Your articles give high praise to the mujahideen and contras for fighting communism, but when real Americans stand up for their beliefs you refer to them as anarchists and link them to communism and Khadaffi.

Being outcasts in their own country is the Indians' only sin.

Douglas Rangel
Long Beach, California

Most participants in AIM activities were merely looking for some excitement, something to do. Reservation life is exceedingly boring. The serious-minded activists were malcontents and criminals but few in number and they did try to get help from the communists. Traditional Indians avoided AIM because it violated spiritual traditions. Had AIM not occupied the church and tipped the flag upside down, many traditional people would have gone to Wounded Knee out of sympathy for AIM.

Your article on Wounded Knee was quite accurate. It is nice to have whites write truthfully about us Indians. We were the most formidable opponents the United States ever had and ever will have. Once peace was established, Indians always volunteered to fight for the United States in large numbers during the wars and we always will. Lastly, the old-time religion is still practiced by many Indians, and there were many instances of psychic phenomena witnessed by both sides at Wounded Knee. But you won't find it in any official documentation. I know — I was there.

Ernie Red Bear
Louisville, Kentucky

BOOS FOR THE BRADLEY...

Sirs:

It's about time an important source of information like SOF brought the Bradley IFV to public scrutiny. This ultra-expensive albatross fails in almost all its designated missions even after the Pentagon has changed them time after time.

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One could also question why the Army chose a 30mm gun for the AH-64A Apache and a 25mm gun for the Bradley. We shouldn't be creating logistics nightmares, we should be working to avoid them.

Royce Scott
Deer Park, Texas

SMALL ARMS TODAY WANTS YOU...

Sirs:

I would like to solicit help from your readers in updating the *Small Arms Today* data base of small caliber weapons currently used by armed forces around the world. Since *Small Arms Today* was first published in 1986, we have been continuously adding substantial new information about national inventories to a computer data base. In addition, we have begun to record data regarding the small arms used by police forces, paramilitary forces and anti-government forces. *Small Arms Today* is presently the only such data base for the basic weapons of the infantry man.

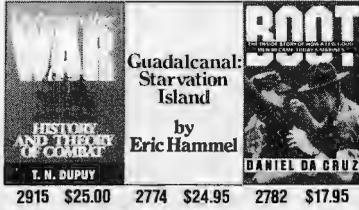
Unfortunately we are limited by the availability of reliable data. I believe that SOF readers can help us spot and identify the types of weapons being used and thus add to or confirm the data in our computer files. I can provide the latest updated pages for specific countries to interested individuals. Any readers interested in assisting us can contact me as follows: Dr. Ed Ezell, AFHD/NMAH, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560.

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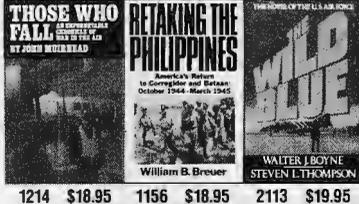
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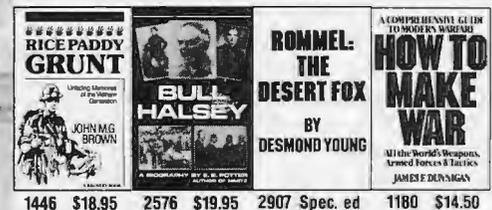
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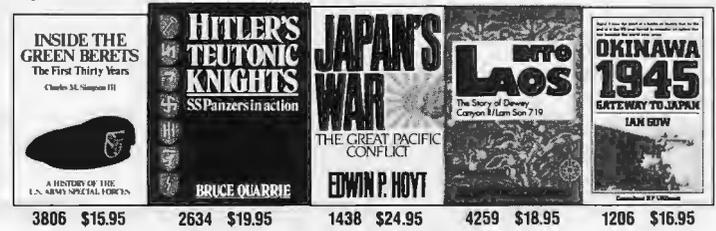


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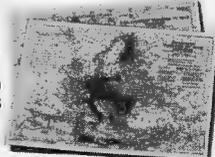
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SMOKED BY LIFE?...

Sirs:

Looks like you guys got "smoked" by *Life* magazine. Their November '87 issue has a smuggled-out photo of a live POW on page 119. I thought SOF was taking point when it came to liberating our POWs?

Have faith though, they are having trouble identifying him. Maybe one of your readers can help. By the way, did you ever get an ID on the downed pilots in the June '87 issue?

J.A. Salvato
Houston, Texas

Whether SOF was "smoked" on the POW/MIA beat by Life's publication of the "Roly" photo or whether Life was had when it published it, only time will tell. Since 1981 we've looked at perhaps a dozen "POW in Laos" photos. Like the "Roly" photo, most show a round-eye standing in the jungle, generally looking down or away from the camera. The problem is, the jungle looks pretty much the same on both the Thai and Laotian sides of the Mekong. And as the Life article pointed out, opinion is split as to whether the "Roly" in the photo bears any resemblance to the Charles Rowley who's missing. Most of the "POW" photos we've seen actually turned out to have been made in the 1960s or early 1970s and, with one exception, the individuals have been accounted for. Others were obvious fakes. I once watched a professional POW scam artist passing off a POW photo taken in 1961 as recent. When dealing with POW photos, we always start by asking: "Who took the photo? When? Where? How? And for what purpose?"

We still don't know who the downed pilots are.



CHEM WAR IN BURMA...

Sirs:

As a frequent denizen of the Burma frontier, I found SOF's December '87 coverage of the war there superb. Bruce Siegel and the inimitable Jake Border both provided lucid, candid examinations of major aspects of a complex conflict. The frontier peoples' 40-year struggle for freedom is largely unknown to the outside world. The Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma's severe human rights abuses continue unprotested and there is little relief aid for the victims.

Concerned Americans can help by writing their congressman to demand an end to the aid program which gives Burma 2,4-D herbicide. It's supposed to be an anti-narcotics program but has not decreased Burma's opium production one ounce. Burma uses 2,4-D (an Agent Orange ingredient) to clear out "security risk" tribals. The frontier tribes were valiant warriors for the Allies in WWII — remember Wingate's Chindits and Merrill's Marauders? Now they are fighting for their survival. They helped us. Help them. Write.

Edith T. Mirante
Cranford, New Jersey



MORE MILL-GOTTEN FAME FOR HANOI JANE...

Sirs:

My wife and I felt your readers should know what *Woman's Day* has done. In their October 27, 1987 issue they ran an article titled "50 Who Changed Our Lives." In this list they included Hanoi Jane Fonda "for combining acting and political activism and obviously caring a lot about both, and for helping us all to go for the burn."

Our country's women continue to honor this anti-American bitch with awards and by purchasing her clothing, videos and movie tickets. Why hasn't our country convicted her of treason at the very least?

You should write and express your views to *Woman's Day* about Hanoi Jane: *Woman's Day*, Attn: Managing Editor, CBS Magazines, 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036.

Gary Olson
Minneapolis,
Minnesota

LETTERS

Your input has made FLAK one of SOF's most popular columns. We want to know what you think — about SOF or any other subject you consider worth our readers' attention. If you'd like to see your letter in print the way you wrote it, keep it brief and to the point. Send letters to FLAK, c/o SOF, PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. ✉

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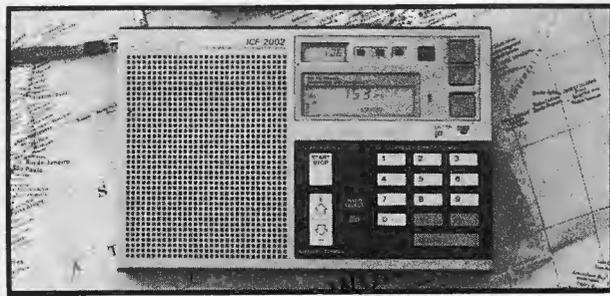
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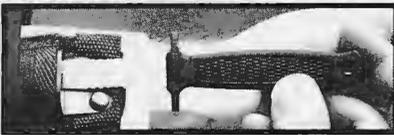


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BANNING IN BAVARIA?...

In a rather rambling letter we recently received from the Bavarian Department of Youth, we were informed that SOF is now on its list of publications they consider "damaging to German youth." Uh huh.

According to Bavaria's Big Brother, SOF "idolizes a primitive fascist, outdated 'macho' image as characterized by hardness, strength of nerve, aggressiveness, unwillingness to compromise... All characteristics that in our modern society no longer meet with acceptance." Uh huh.

"On these grounds we base our decision that 'Soldier of Fortune' idolizes and promotes armed conflict and war... That is why we feel it necessary to place it on the list of publications youths are prohibited to purchase." Uh huh.

TO THE NORTH POLE WITH PUBLISHER ROBERT K. BROWN?...

Join RKB and adventurer Jack Wheeler on an eight-day trip to the North Pole, 23-30 April 1988. For further info, write North Pole, c/o SOF, Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306.

BULLETIN BOARD



MOVING THE GOODS...

In October 1987, our Refugee Relief International, Inc., paid out \$2,513.38, which represents the cost of moving medical and refugee supplies worth \$388,422 to Central America as part of an ongoing program which provides medical help for internal refugees in Guatemala. Every RRIL dollar spent moved a bit more than \$154 worth of medical and relief supplies. Even your stockbroker would admit that's a highly leveraged investment, but a lot more needs to be done. Donations are tax-deductible and should be sent to: Refugee Relief International, Inc., PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306.

SOF EASY MEDIA PREY?...

Whenever some deranged goon with a bit of camouflage and a weapon decides to play avenging angel, the press (guardians of their right to sell papers and make big bucks) usually tries to find some connection to SOF.

Take the case of Michael Ryan, a haywire Brit who last year slaughtered 16 of his fellow man in what's been termed the U.K. Hungerford massacre. Our U.K. correspondent tells us that SOF took a beating in their press, although as it turns out, Ryan's thoughts were more attuned to the 10th dimension than to Third World wars.

According to London's *Sunday Mail*, Ryan was involved in a mail-order game-playing scenario called *Further Into Fantasy*, a spin-off of *Dungeons and Dragons* in which players assume make-believe identities and battle their way through fairy tale... well, dungeons and dragons. Ryan, as Phodius Tei, an evil high priest, took make-believe into the land of reality when he received instructions to "kill [his] fellow Terrans." Terrans or no, 16 people paid the price for living on Ryan's fantasy island — with nary an SOF in sight.

MUAMMAR STRIKES BACK...

We've been keeping a close eye on the Chad-Libya confrontation these past few months, and word comes to us that Khadaffi is none too happy with the way his own forces are handling the war — they're getting beaten most of the time. So, as most beleaguered warlords do in times like these, he's started hiring mercenaries. Reports say Libyan political outposts around the world have recruited hundreds of Druze veterans of Lebanon along with Palestinians who are willing to fight Libya's southern neighbor for \$1,000 a month. A few pilots have also taken Muammar up on his offer of \$10,000 a month plus bonuses for targets destroyed.

We don't think it'll do him much good. The Chadians, trained by French advisers, have shown they can take anything Libya throws their way — and return it in kind.

LIBYA DOTH PROTEST...

And speaking of the north African blight, SOF reader Richard A. Sheridan passed this item along from Cairo, Egypt, where he saw it in *The Egyptian Gazette*. Seems Libya condemned the United States for sending trained dolphins into the Persian Gulf to help stop enemy frogmen from attacking American warships pulling escort duties. A monitored Libyan news report called on SPCAs around the world to organize protest campaigns against the "dolphin annihilation by American imperialists."

From the people who brought you worldwide terrorism, we now have "The Friends of Flipper Society." It's enough to make you give up sushi.

SOF LISTENS...

Have your reader surveys had an impact on us? You bet! Although we're still compiling and analyzing your surveys, we're already making changes that you've told us you want to see. Beginning this issue, we'll be alternating some of our columns and departments on a

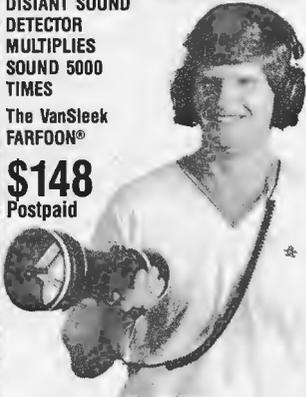
Continued on page 12

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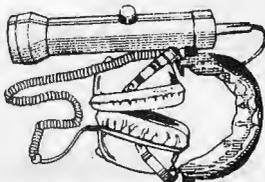
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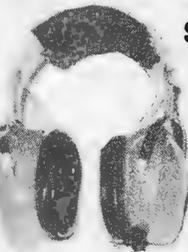
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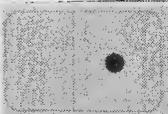
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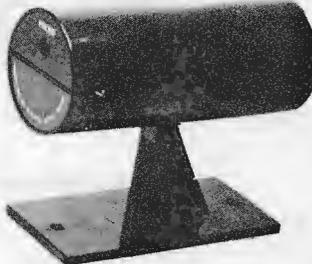
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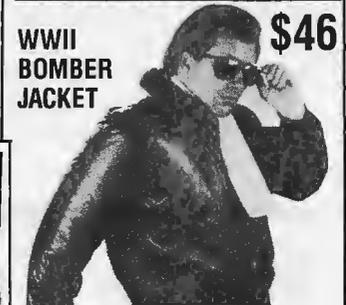
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monthly basis. Adventure Quartermaster and In Review will trade billets each month, as will Battle Blades and Full Auto. FLAK, Bulletin Board, I Was There and Combat Weaponcraft (departments and columns which you rated highest) will continue to stand muster each month. We've also added, in response to your suggestions, a new department called Parting Shot, found on the last page. PS will feature guest editorials and commentary applicable to *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine or photos that deserve a place in our TO&E. If you want to take a shot at writing for Parting Shot, submit your 1,300-word manuscript to SOF, Attn: Editorial/Parting Shot, PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. All submissions should be typewritten and double-spaced. Payment will be based upon current rates, and manuscripts accepted are subject to editing and revision as deemed necessary by our editorial staff.

MALONGO SHOOT-OUT...

As most SOF readers know, Chevron-Gulf Corporation has been busily pumping crude out of the Angolan exclave of Cabinda in southwestern Africa, profits from which help the Angolan communist MPLA government finance Cuban mercenaries in their fight against Jonas Savimbi's pro-Western UNITA movement.

Word comes to us that CG's main terminal at Malongo in Cabinda is not the safest place in the world to buzz around in helicopters. Angolan government FAPLA troops, tasked with guarding Malongo from the likes of South African and UNITA raiders, take air defense seriously — but not too selectively.

Recently, an Angolan military helicopter carrying four people, including a Portuguese and a Frenchman, had permission to fly Malongo's perimeter to scout locations for TV transmitting towers. FAPLA troops along the fence reckoned their airspace was being violated (no matter by their own people) and shot it down anyway. The official finding? You guessed it: mechanical problems — even though the chopper was stitched with bullet holes.

"Get to know us. You won't regret it," reads an Angolan airlines poster. How about, "Get close to us. You won't live through it," instead?

GOODBYE LUCY'S...

Old soldiers, professional adventurers and Southeast Asia hands will be sorry to hear that Lucy's Tiger Den, Bangkok's cosmopolitan watering hole run by A.J. "Tiger" Rydberg since 1971, is closing up. Lucy's became the gathering point for thousands of GIs on R&R from Vietnam, construction and oil workers from across SEA, as well as assorted mercs, journalists and spooks. As SOF staffers can attest, Lucy's also served as an ad hoc post locator; if you needed to find someone, Lucy's was the place to ask.

Rydberg said lack of business forced the closing, but he plans to open up a new pub in Manila, PI, sometime this year. We'll see you there.



PRODUCT WARNING...

Smith & Wesson, one of the world's most respected firearms manufacturers, has issued the following warning based upon reports received from the field where the combination of a Smith & Wesson L-frame .357 Magnum revolver and some .357 Magnum ammunition has resulted in unacceptable cylinder binding:

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Smith & Wesson will modify your L-frame revolver free of charge to eliminate the possibility of cylinder binding with .357 Magnum ammunition. Further information and locations of S&W's Warranty Service Centers can be obtained by calling toll-free 1-800-458-8469 between 9 am and 6 pm (Eastern), Monday through Friday (in Massachusetts, call collect 413-734-8244). If the lines are busy, keep trying.

We salute Smith & Wesson for putting this information out to the public. It may save lives, and that's what counts.

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A medical organization operating in Pakistan training mujahideen paramedics is in need of trainers. Former Special Forces medics and those with similar skills are preferred. Emergency room doctors, surgeons, emergency medical technicians and nurses experienced in trauma are also needed. This is a seven-month contract with a small stipend, room and board, and airfare provided. Hand-write a cover letter explaining your interest in this operation and provide a detailed resume along with current references. Direct this information to MEDIC, c/o Soldier of Fortune, PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. No phone calls, please. You'll be contacted if you meet the requirements.

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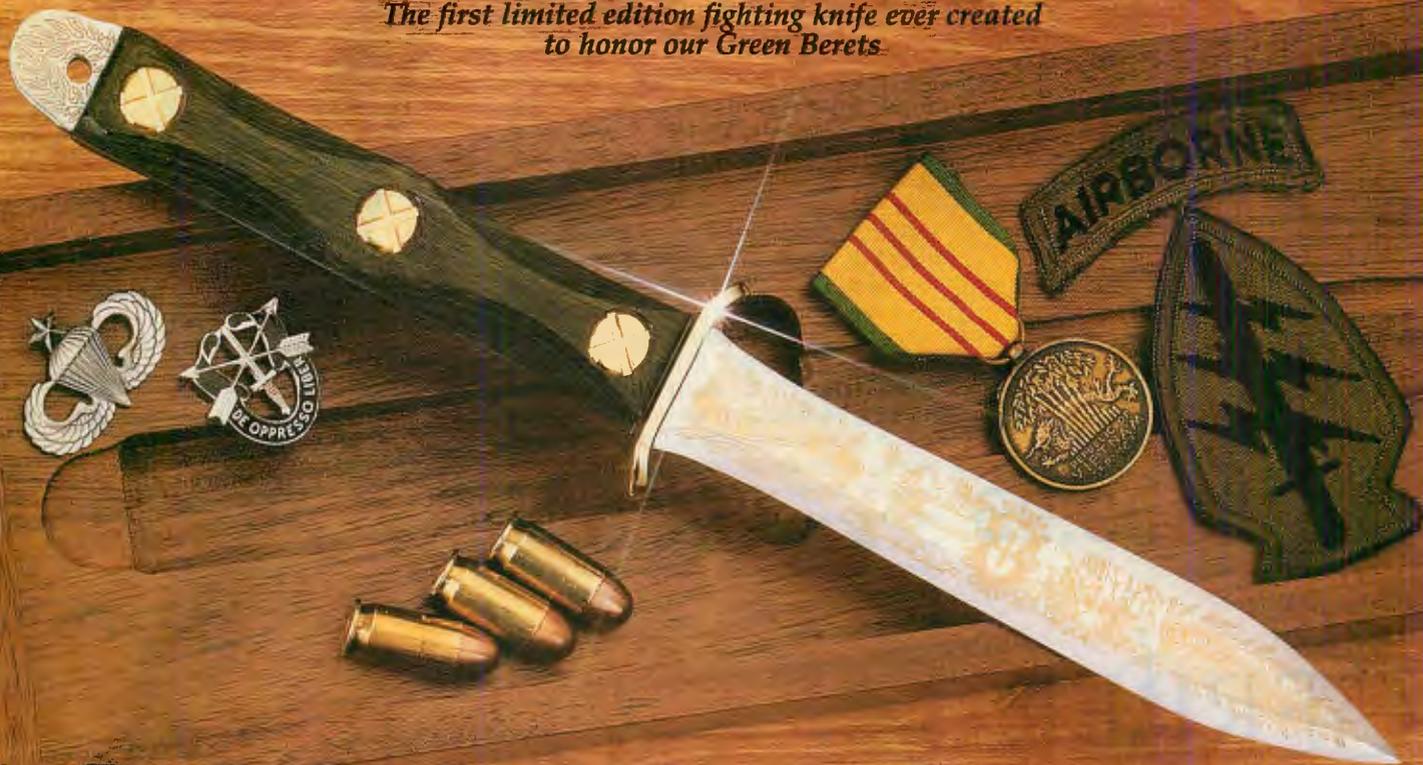
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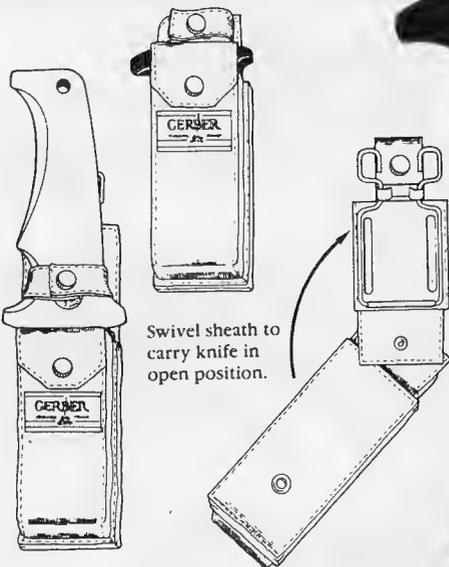
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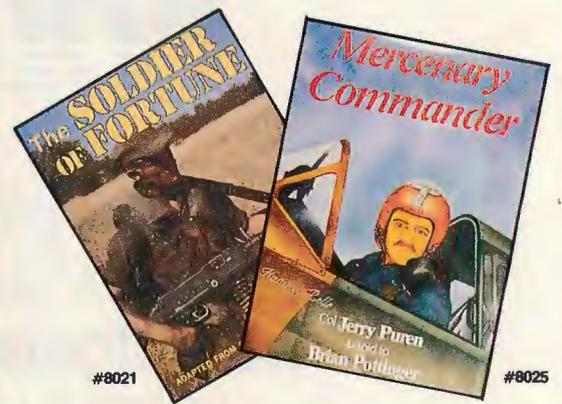
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"THAT damn thing's a disaster waiting to happen," the platoon sergeant said after inspecting the perimeter bunker that was listing to one side and looked as though it might cave in any time.

"Poppich, I want you, Swain and the others from second squad to fix up this bunker," he added. "While you're at it, get an engineer down here to tell you the best way to do it."

The platoon sergeant walked off toward the next bunker, continuing his inspection of bunkers within the company's assigned sector. The Vietnamese morning temperature had already reached the low 90s and it looked to be another hot day.

"Fuck it!" Poppich said, studying the bunker. "We don't need no REMF engineer to tell us what or how to do something we can do ourselves. We'll replace some sandbags, straighten the wall and it'll be better than ever."

The plan seemed easy enough, so the seven members of second squad went to work. It took two days just to remove the old torn, sunbleached sandbags and fill and set new ones.

Once this was done they dismantled the ceiling and roof of the bunker. Corrugated steel planks that had once held the sandbags in place were removed and replaced with wooden planks and ammunition boxes full of dirt. When the wooden framed ceiling was ready, they formed a line and hoisted the first layer of sandbags over the frame. Second and third layers followed until the perimeter bunker stood slightly higher and squarer than the others that encircled the base camp.

"Now that's a bunker!" Swain said with obvious satisfaction while the others in the squad beamed.

"No," corrected Poppich, "it's *the* bunker." He was strutting around it admiring his handiwork and feeling proud of their accomplishment. Thirty pounds of dirt went into each olive drab sandbag and it took hundreds of sandbags to complete the necessary repairs. It also took a great deal of planning and coordination as well as four days of exhausting work. From all appearances it was a showpiece, and even the platoon sergeant had to reluctantly agree.

"It don't exactly look like the others, but I guess the engineers know what they're doing," he said.

"What engineers?" Poppich replied. "We did it ourselves. There's nothing those REMFs can do that we can't do better."

"That's affirmative," Swain added. "It's the old infantry know-how."

The platoon sergeant listened quietly then left without a word, adopting a "wait and see" attitude. He'd been in the infantry long enough to know that



I WAS THERE

by Kregg Jorgenson

Engineers' Revenge



Anyone who's ever been in a bunker while artillery shells were dropping from the sky can understand the sentiment. But a bunker built with "infantry know-how" and little else can be just as dangerous as the enemy. Photo: DoD

infantry know-how amounted to little more than a quick fix for a momentary problem.

His hunch paid off when the first rain came. The Vietnam-style downpour quickly drenched the compound, and the dirt-filled wooden ammunition crates used to "quick-fix" the bunker accumulated extra weight as they soaked up gallons of rainwater. The bunker let out a low, creaking moan as the wood began to expand and give. A loud splitting crack was heard and the bunker's inhabitants hurried outside. A ring of GIs formed around the area, watching and listening to the dying bunker. Within minutes the entire platoon was there watching the spectacle as a terrible shudder and final splintering break sent the bunker crashing into itself.

While second squad stood silently over the wreckage of the dead bunker, questions from onlookers were met

with shrugs and blank expressions.

"Well," the platoon sergeant said, sizing up the situation. "Care to tell me more about your infantry know-how? Then, while you're at it, why don't you explain to me why you think the Army has engineers. And maybe something about what they have to offer to someone like you and me."

"I . . . I guess we made a mistake," Poppich said with a lowered head and whipped dog look.

"Understatement," the platoon sergeant shot back.

"We fucked up," Poppich added.

"Bingo!" yelled the platoon sergeant. "Now, get ahold of the engineers like I said and start over again. Lordy, lordy, lordy. I'm just glad you guys don't take it upon yourselves to work on any of the division's helicopters." The platoon sergeant was shaking his head and smiling as he walked away.

"I used to be in helicopter maintenance," Swain exclaimed.

This caused the platoon sergeant to turn around and glare at him. "Don't you ever let me hear you say that again. You hear me, Swain, *ever*."

It was a long morning and it was becoming a long war. Much too long. ☒



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SEMIAUTOMATIC rifles don't hold a candle to turn-bolts in accuracy potential. Right? Not necessarily. Some semiautos will shoot rings around some bolt-actions. Colt's AR-15A2 H-BAR (heavy barrel) is one of the former.

Adopted in controversy during the even more controversial Vietnam War, America's M16 service rifle has been labeled everything from a "mouse gun" by its detractors to the "black stick" by Charlie, who had more deadly experience than most armchair experts from which to assess its effectiveness.

With a gas action taken from the Swedish Ljungman AG42 and a trigger mechanism based on that of the M1 Garand, all rifles in the M16 series operate, briefly, as follows: After ignition of the primer, the projectile passes the barrel's gas port, permitting gas to flow back through a stainless steel tube and a so-called bolt-carrier key into the hollow interior of the bolt carrier. As the carrier moves rearward, a cam slot cut into the carrier turns the bolt's cam pin, which causes the bolt to rotate clockwise, freeing the eight locking lugs from their abutments in the barrel extension. The carrier's momentum draws the bolt rearward at a slightly reduced velocity.

After the extractor has withdrawn the empty case from the chamber, a spring-loaded bump-type ejector protruding from the left side of the bolt face rotates the case around the extractor claw and out the ejection port of the upper receiver body. The bolt carrier assembly continues rearward, compressing the recoil spring and cocking the hammer.

The buffer and recoil spring return the carrier, and a fresh round is stripped from the magazine. All forward bolt motion stops after the round is chambered. The carrier continues forward to contact the rear face of the barrel extension and its cam slot turns the cam pin which rotates the bolt and its lugs anti-clockwise into the locked position.

While much criticized by those who sought, for whatever reasons, to find fault with the M16 from muzzle to buttplate, the truth is that this system of gas operation (also employed in the French MAS 49/56 series) works, and quite well, if properly maintained.

Although it has no selective-fire option (the lower receiver, trigger mechanism and bolt carrier are taken from the semiauto-only AR-15), the AR-15A2 H-BAR has most of the M16A2's features. In fact, with one important exception, the AR-15A2 H-BAR's upper receiver is that of the M16A2 rifle approved for service by the USMC in September 1982 and type-classified by the U.S. Army in



FULL AUTO

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

Semiauto Suitable for Sniping



Colt's AR-15A2 H-BAR rifle is capable of cleaning any and all military match competition. It consistently shot under 1 MOA with Black Hills' 60-grain ammunition.

November 1982.

Colt has retained a maximum diameter for the barrel's entire 20-inch length (overall length of the rifle is 39 inches). This has increased the rifle's weight to a total of 8 pounds 7 ounces, an increase of 15 ounces over the M16A2 (7.5 pounds, empty). Remember the old M16 you toted in Vietnam? It weighed only 6.7 pounds, empty. Rifling remains that of the M16A2 — six grooves with a right-hand twist of one turn in 7 inches.

The barrel has been fitted with an A2 flash suppressor — a bird-cage type, without the sixth port on the bottom (deleted to reduce muzzle climb and diminish position disclosure when firing from the prone position in desert climates). Barrel and flash suppressor are interfaced by a set of peel-washers so that the muzzle device can be rotated either to the right or left, for right- or left-handed shooters, respectively.

Held by a tapered slip ring, the round A2 handguards are more comfortable than the M16A1's triangular cross-section handguards, and much

easier to remove and install.

The upper receiver casting has incorporated a case deflector to the rear of the ejector port which throws empty cases clear of left-handed shooters. In semiautomatic fire, the ejection pattern has been altered 5 or 6 degrees forward by this deflection hump. The M16A2's improved ejection port dust cover has been installed. Its spring-loaded retaining catch has been strengthened and enlarged. Gratefully, the dust cover's latch-pin is no longer retained by the slip-washer that so often disappeared at the wrong time. The forward bolt assist is the current configuration with a button-like shape and concentric rings. The M16A2 buttstock was lengthened by $\frac{5}{8}$ inch. The buttplate's edges are no longer rounded and the entire surface, not just the butt-trap, is deeply checkered. The pistol grip has deep longitudinal grooves along its rear face and a finger swell 1 inch below the trigger guard. The lower and upper receivers are connected at the forward end by two screws instead of the push-pin found on the selective-fire M16s.

The highly vaunted 800-meter sights requested by the Marines have also found their way onto the AR-15A2 H-BAR. The rear sight (taken from the old M16 light machine gun) is

a flip-type peep with two apertures calibrated for M855 ammunition. Flipped forward, the large aperture (0.197 inches in diameter), marked "0-2," is brought into view for ranges out to 200 meters, low-light levels or moving targets. When firing within this range, the elevation knob should be set to "8/3" with the sight base at its lowest position. Flipped back, the peep sight brings the small aperture (0.70 inches in diameter) into view for ranges of 300 to 800 meters. A small indicator line matches up with the windage calibration lines on the back of the sight base. One audible click of the windage knob moves the sight 0.4 minute right or left. With the small aperture in use, the elevation knob should be set at the range required: "8/3" low for 300m, "4" for 400m, "5" for 500m, "7" for 700m and "8/3" high for 800m. Audible clicks between the main settings will raise or lower the elevation by approximately one minute of angle. The front-sight post is square and adjusted only for initial zero.

There is little reason to function-test any M16, as the reliability of the entire series has been well established (see "M16A2: The Final Verdict," SOF, January '85). To that end we chose to fire our AR-15A2 H-BAR test specimen from the bench using optical

sights. On hand was a Steiner 4x24mm NATO rifle scope which was attached to the rifle with an A.R.M.S. (Dept. SOF, 230 W. Center St., West Bridgewater, MA 02379) M16A1/A2 Universal Top Scope Base. This A.R.M.S. base accepts both Weaver and NATO STANAG military scope fastenings. It features a special bolt and self-locking thumbscrew that assures retention of zero through repeated removal and a wide-angle "TV-screen" iron sight see-through.

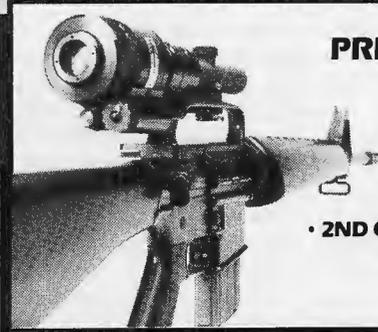
The rugged Steiner scope (distributed by Pioneer, Inc., Dept. SOF, 216 Haddon Ave., Westmont, NJ 08108) uses the traditional German military reticle pattern. This consists of a single thick, pointed post at the bottom of the field of view with horizontal side bars and stadia lines. Although an excellent combat format, especially in subdued light, it is less than ideal for punching paper.

Ammunition of two types was selected for our accuracy test. As the M16A2 series is supposedly optimized for performance with M855 ammunition, we obtained 200 rounds of Portuguese M855 ball (headstamped "FNM 86-2" with NATO cross in circle). Its 62-grain sharply tapered SS109 projectile has a hardened-steel penetrator frontal core which provides armor

penetration superior to the M80 7.62x51mm NATO bullet at greater ranges. The Boxer primed brass case is loaded with 23 grains of a flattened ball-type powder. Color codes for the bullet tip, case mouth sealant and primer annulus are green. Ten feet from the muzzle this ammunition yielded an average velocity of 3,042 fps with a standard deviation of 26 fps. At 100 yards, group size averaged 1.9 inches. While this will out-perform any Kalashnikov ever fielded, the best was yet to come.

M855-type ammunition will not generally be available to the public, especially now after enactment of Public Law 99-408, which regulates the manufacture, importation and sale of armor-piercing ammunition.

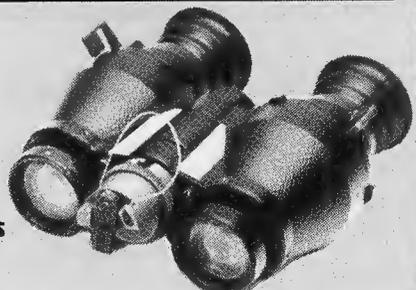
Black Hills Shooters Supply (Dept. SOF, 3401 South Highway 79, Rapid City, SD 57701) provided a test batch of their new 5.56x45mm NATO ammunition designed for rifles with 1:7-inch twist. Using mixed lots of U.S. military brass filled with 25 grains of a flattened ball-type propellant, a 60-grain Hornady Soft-Point (SP) bullet is driven with an average velocity of 2,928 fps. While more than 100 fps below military M855 ball, the standard deviation was a match-grade 21 fps. With gentle winds gusting at 5 mph,



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our group average at 100 yards through Colt's button-broached heavy barrel was only 0.9 inches. Under 1 MOA is sniper-grade accuracy on anyone's score card and truly impressive for a gas-operated rifle.

Colt specifications require a minimum trigger pull weight of 5.0 pounds and a maximum of 8.5 pounds. The

Colt AR-15A2 H-BAR, fieldstripped.
Note contour of heavy barrel.

single-stage trigger on SOF's test specimen broke cleanly at exactly 5.0 pounds. Best accuracy resulted when the forward end of the handguards rested on the bench rest's sandbag.

Group dispersion increased as the bench rest was moved toward the chamber end of the rifle. This is contrary to what we expected, as disturbance of the barrel's vibration harmonics should intensify as the rest is moved forward.

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VEIL: THE SECRET WARS OF THE CIA 1981-1987. By Bob Woodward. Simon & Schuster, Dept. SOF, 130 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. 1987. 543 pages. Hardcover. \$21.95. Review by Neil C. Livingstone.

IN REVIEW



**BOB
WOODWARD**

**VEIL:
The Secret
Wars of the
CIA 1981-1987**

WHAT do John Belushi and Bill Casey have in common? Well, for one thing, they were both dead when Bob Woodward published books about them. Neither could respond to Woodward's interpretation of the events surrounding their lives — and deaths — or to the words and motives he attributed to them. One observer has called it "journalistic necrophilia."

Herein lies the chief problem with Woodward's latest blockbuster, **Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987**. Tennyson once observed that, "A lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies." So it is with Woodward's book. There is much about **Veil** that is true, but it is difficult to separate fact from fiction.

If you accept Woodward's book at face value, the late CIA Director William Casey met with the liberal *Washington Post* reporter, who was one of Gary Hart's roommates before Donna Rice, more than four dozen times and confided to him the Agency's deepest, darkest secrets. Why? So that Woodward could publish them in a book that does inestimable harm to the U.S. intelligence community and the whole notion of covert operations.

Bill Casey, after all, came to the CIA with one goal in mind: to revitalize the CIA after the traumas of Vietnam,

Watergate, the Church Committee hearings and the ambiguous foreign policy of Jimmy Carter. He was, moreover, the father of the so-called "Reagan Doctrine," which has as its main tenet U.S. support of anti-communist insurgencies around the globe. Casey's ultimate goal, as Woodward correctly notes, was to roll back communism in just one place and thereby destroy the Marxist myth of invincibility.

It is clear from reading Woodward's book that many people talked to him. I have no doubt that Casey met with him on a number of occasions. The question is, how much did Bill Casey actually say to him? He knew Woodward was writing a book on the CIA, and it would have been foolish not to have attempted to learn what it was going to contain, and for Casey not to give his own interpretation to certain events. But Woodward portrays his relationship with the sage old spook as almost filial, a characterization that Casey's wife, Sophia, and others close to him reject out of hand. Indeed, it is easier to imagine Casey taking a shine to Pee Wee Herman than someone like Woodward, whose newspaper — *The Washington Post* — is known for practicing a fancy form of tabloid journalism, where every scoop appears in print no matter what the impact on the nation's security and well-being. **Veil** is vintage Woodward and writing that all of the "hate America first" types can revel in.

Those who know Casey best are highly skeptical of many of the quotes attributed to him. According to former Casey assistant Herb Meyer, "The voice is *not* Bill Casey's. He just didn't use words in that fashion."

Even more disturbing is the last scene in Woodward's book, where he describes sneaking into the dying man's hospital room and confronting him over the Iran-Contra affair. Casey allegedly admits that he knew of the diversion of funds to the contras and justifies it by saying, "I believed." When challenged by Ted Koppel to describe Casey's hospital room or confirm whether he was on a life-support system, Woodward demurred, contending that to do so would risk exposing the individual who aided him in gaining access to Casey. Aside from the obvious inconsistency that it is all

right for Woodward to protect his sources but not for the nation to keep secrets, a careful and detailed study of the CIA security arrangements that were in place at the time suggests that it would have been nearly impossible for the reporter to have penetrated Casey's hospital room unobserved.

Even more damning, Mrs. Casey and her daughter were with Casey around the clock throughout his hospitalization. On the approximately three occasions during this period that they left the room, Casey's son-in-law sat at his bedside.

But the most irrefutable fact of all is that Casey was suffering from a medical condition known as expressive aphasia and, according to family, friends and CIA doctors, was incapable of meaningful conversation. From his brain surgery in December 1986 until his death on 6 May 1987, Casey spoke only 11 words (some repeated), and all were reflexive rather than reflective responses. Thus, even if Woodward miraculously was able to give Casey's security the slip and for some inexplicable reason found the former CIA director sitting in a chair with no one else around, he could not have had the conversation with Casey that he recounts in his book.

If the efficacy question were not enough, there is also the issue of Woodward's revelations of alleged U.S. intelligence operations, revelations that are embarrassing to American allies around the globe and instructive to the nation's enemies. By selling the nation's secrets in **Veil**, Woodward stands to double his estimated net worth of \$6 million. By contrast, members of the infamous Walker family spy ring got life sentences for doing the same thing — for far less money.

Veil is an abomination to the memory of a great and gifted man who is not here to defend himself. Readers ultimately will have to judge for themselves just how much of **Veil** they are prepared to accept. But for this reviewer, **Veil** succeeds not in discrediting Casey, but rather Bob Woodward.

Neil Livingstone is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and writes frequently on terrorism and national defense issues. He co-authored "Spetsnaz Invades America," *SOF*, January '88. ✕

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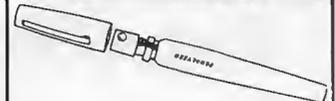
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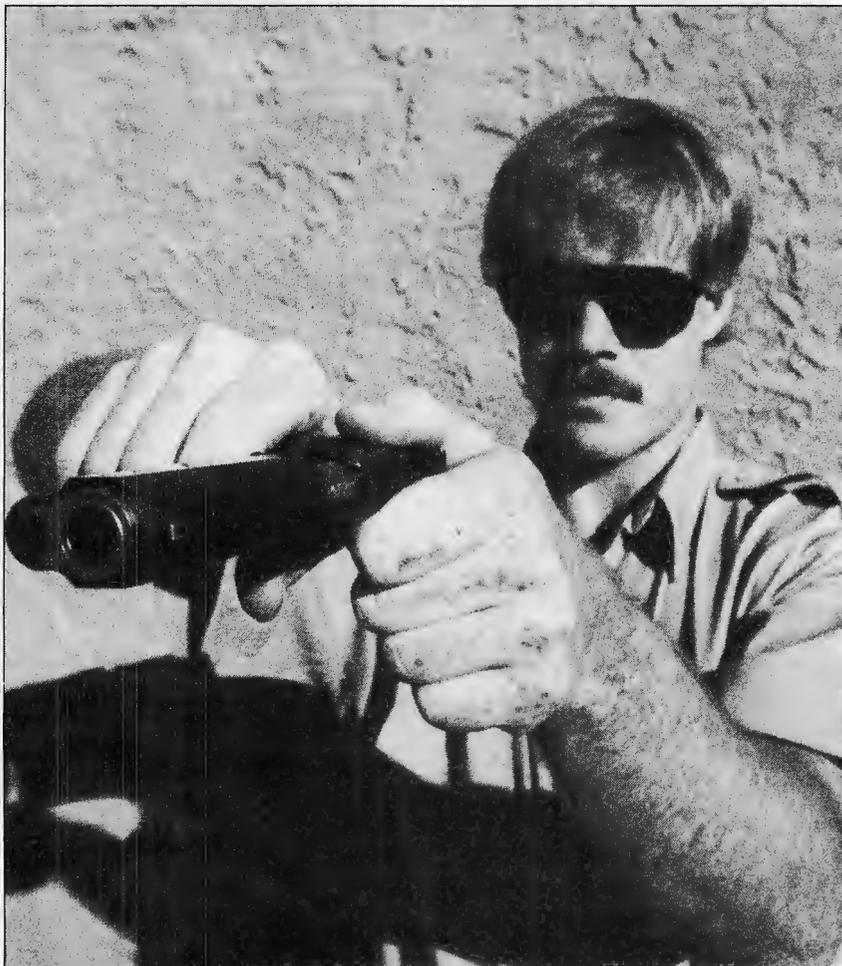
COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

SHOOTOUT AT THE OK KIBBUTZ

Modified Israeli Pistol-Shooting Technique

by Jack Thompson

Photos by John Coleman



JUMPING up in a flash as Radio Tel Aviv sounds his unit's code words for mobilization, Saul runs to his room to gather up his gear before going to the mobilization point.

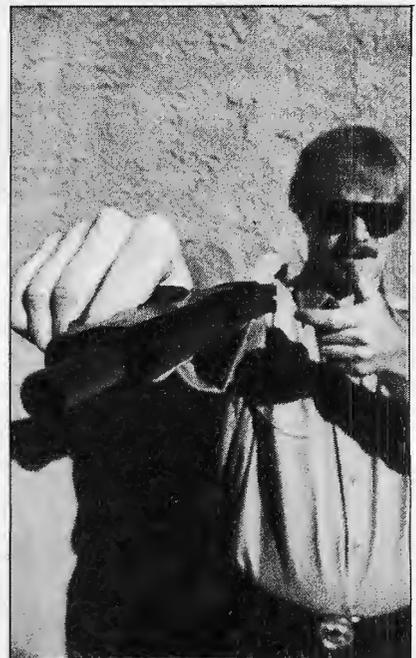
Grabbing his Browning High Power 9mm pistol, he slams in a full magazine and jams the weapon under his belt. Slinging a trusty Galil over his back, he picks up his equipment and runs for the bus.

The five-minute wait for the bus seems like an entire year. After boarding and squeezing past women and screaming children, Saul finds himself a crowded seat next to a window.

Meanwhile, just up the road, Abdul and two Shi'ite buddies wait patiently like snakes in a culvert. The bus full of civilians must pass them to get to the mobilization point where Saul is headed. Their AK-47s are poised and ready to spit hot death at the bus. As it approaches and slows down to avoid some potholes in the road, Abdul and company joyfully rake their target with

LEFT: Israel's pistol-shooting technique begins by drawing the pistol from the holster and rotating it 90 degrees as you bring it up to nose level. With the pistol flat on its side, slide facing inward and the shooting arm bent at about a 45-degree angle, grasp the serrations on the slide with the thumb and forefinger of the weak hand.

BELOW: Now *push* the pistol forward by extending the shooting arm in a punching motion to chamber a round. †



COMBAT TESTED

Jack Thompson is a long-time associate of *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine. Currently a personal security consultant and trainer, Jack's combat experience spans the globe. He first served in the USMC in Vietnam for five years, fought in Rhodesia with both the SAS and Selous Scouts for six years and has trained freedom fighters in Central America while providing bodyguard services for diplomatic personnel.

automatic fire.

The sight of muzzle flashes followed by thumps of bullets impacting on the bus causes Saul to instinctively pull his pistol from his belt, grab the slide, chamber a round and empty the magazine at the attackers. His quick reactions force Abdul and company to dive for cover, stopping their fire momentarily and making them eat a little dust.

Being an International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC) shooter with two world matches under my belt, I could never quite understand why Israeli soldiers like Saul are taught to chamber a pistol round *after* trouble starts rather than before. Didn't he waste valuable time loading his pistol under fire? Wouldn't he have been better off locked and cocked, that is,



Assume shooting position by moving the weak hand forward and placing it firmly over the master hand, sights vertical at eye level.

with a round in the chamber and safety on? For those of us with extensive competitive shooting and/or combat experience, it would seem that the answer to these last two questions is an obvious "yes."

Surprisingly, these questions aren't quite as straightforward as they might appear. It was only after an eye- and mind-opening shooting session with two seasoned proponents of this Israeli shooting technique that I understood the "whys" and "hows" of it. After practicing drawing, chambering a round and shooting a couple dozen times, I learned that this form of shooting is only slightly slower, *but infinitely safer*, than the IPSC locked-and-cocked style. The reason? It all but eliminates accidental discharges. And for the Israelis, this is a top priority.

Before explaining how the technique is executed, we need to address, from the Israeli point of view, specifically why it was adopted. The first point is that Israel, being a small Jewish state surrounded by hostile Arab states, needs a citizen army. This means that a high proportion of young men and women keep their weapons at home, ready for immediate use. Also, armed soldiers often ride public transportation surrounded by the same unarmed civilians they are defending. For these reasons, Israel cannot afford accidents with weapons in public because, in a country of only three million people, every warm body counts.

The author's own modification on the Israeli technique is to chamber a round at waist, rather than eye, level. After drawing the pistol and rotating it 90 degrees inward, keep it at waist level with your forearms parallel to the ground. Grasp the slide with the weak hand and push the pistol forward with the master hand to chamber the round.



Secondly, the Browning High Power, which is the most common pistol in Israel, has a very small factory safety that is difficult to operate under fire. This may actually be a deliberate attempt on the part of the manufacturer to dissuade the user from locked-and-cocked shooting. Whatever the reason, the result is that it may take less time to chamber and then shoot a round from a High Power than it does to fiddle with its unsatisfactory safety and fire a round that was already chambered.

The third point is policy. The "powers that be" in Israel have said categorically, "No round in the chamber — period." This edict applies to everyone, not just a particular group. This policy decision is probably due to the combination of the first two points: public safety and weapon design.

After hearing these former Israeli military officers tell me the rationale behind this policy, it became easier to learn their pistol-shooting technique, which is uniquely suited to their country's needs. It goes like this:

Drawing the pistol from the holster in the usual manner, rotate it 90 degrees as you bring it up to nose level so that the pistol is on its side with the slide facing inward. At this point your shooting arm should be bent at about a 45-degree angle and parallel to the ground. Next, with the weak hand grasp the slide in a vise-like grip be-

Continued on page 79



In this revised technique you can engage close-in targets just as easily and quickly as targets that are farther away. If the target is close, swing the elbow of your master arm back down to your hip to assume a hip shooting position as shown here. If the target is some distance away, bring the weak hand in for a two-handed grip and raise the sights to eye level.

NAVY SEALs IN LIBYA

Cover and Deception Ops Confuse Khadaffi

by John B. Dwyer

IN April 1986, following a number of Libyan-sponsored terrorist attacks on U.S. targets which culminated in the bombing of a Berlin disco frequented by American servicemen, President Reagan authorized an air strike against Libya by U.S. naval and air forces. Staging from the aircraft carriers USS *Coral Sea* (CV-43) and USS *America* (CV-66) as well as England, Navy A-6s, F/A 18s and Air Force F-111s hit Benina airfield outside Benghazi, Benghazi itself and military targets near Tripoli.

Unbeknownst to all but a very few planners and commanders, however, Libya continued to be a target for U.S. operations throughout the summer of 1986. This was first revealed in a copyrighted story by Christopher P. Winner in the 17 September 1987 edition of the Arlington, Virginia *Journal*. Details of the operation are neither confirmed nor denied by the U.S. Navy. Those details, plus what is known about U.S. Navy special warfare operations, produce the following scenario.

The Concept

The unsettled post-raid situation inside Libya, with a paranoid Khadaffi at its center, was ripe for manipulation. The colonel and his intelligence services were highly receptive targets for a cover and deception operation. Its objective: to undermine or destabilize Khadaffi. At the very least it was hoped the operation would keep him off balance so as to deter further Libyan-directed terrorist attacks.

The plan itself was probably worked out in the Operational Security/Operational Deception Branch of the Joint Special Operations Agency or, as Winner suggests, by the president's assistant for national security affairs, Vice Admiral John Poindexter.

The official definition of cover is those measures necessary to give protection to an operation from the enemy intelligence effort. Deception is deliberate manipulation of reality for political and/or military gain. Cover and deception, then, are opposite sides of the same counterfeit coin. The operations are mutually supporting with multiple layers of ploys and plausible ruses or notional misdirection, ranging from planted

false indicators and communications deception to electronic countermeasures that, when combined, deliberately mislead the enemy. These operations combine a general strategic framework with a more detailed, tactical implementation.

In the modern era, the U.S. Navy has had a tactical cover and deception unit, the Beach Jumpers, since 1943. After Vietnam service, the Beach Jumpers were redesignated as Fleet Composite Operational Readiness Group and later moved up to fleet command level and redesignated as Fleet Tactical Deception Groups. At fleet level they are responsible for the electronic countermeasures and electronic warfare portions of the mission. From time to time, U.S. Navy SEALs (SEAL, for Sea, Air and Land, the Navy's special operations forces) may be called on to assist in the execution of deception missions.

At the strategic level, this particular plan against Libya called for such psychological warfare ploys as Khadaffi-targeted disinformation. U.S. Navy SEALs were called upon to execute the plan's tactical dimension.

The Operation

In the interest of stealth, submarines were chosen as insertion and extraction platforms. Two of the oldest nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) in the fleet, USS *Sculpin* (SSN-590) and USS *Shark* (SSN-591), both Skipjack-Class boats home ported in Groton, Connecticut, were selected due to availability. Interestingly enough, the *Sculpin* was the first nuclear-powered attack submarine to ever launch SEAL combat

swimmers. This took place in 1965 during an operational readiness exercise near San Clemente Island.

For the deception operation the submarines and SEALs from SEAL Team Two staged out of La Maddalena and Palau on the northern point of the Mediterranean island of Sardinia, with *Sculpin* and *Shark* alternating missions. The submarines transited most of the 830-mile southeastern course through the Mediterranean underwater utilizing nuclear power. Miles outside the Gulf of Sidra, however, that changed.

Since January 1986, the Soviet navy had been increasing its presence in the central Mediterranean. Among the ships of the Soviet Black Sea fleet's 5th Squadron in the central Mediterranean and Gulf of Sidra were antisubmarine warfare (ASW) destroyers, frigates and a submarine tender with command, control, communications and intelligence capabilities. These and other 5th Squadron combatants were deployed as a naval picket line across the Gulf of Sidra. Once the submarines came within sonar range of the Soviet ships they switched to their backup diesel engines. This not only gave them a quieter run but was intended to mislead any 5th Squadron ship that acquired their sonar signature, thus leading the Soviets to think they had detected anything but a U.S. Navy attack submarine.

From May to October 1986, on a mission day, the *Sculpin* or *Shark* would surface between 2100 and 2400 hours, 13 to 15 miles offshore from Benghazi for a dry-deck launch. Four to six SEALs moved quickly up through the opened aft escape hatch carrying a deflated black Zodiac rubber boat, muffled Mercury engine and equipment. On deck they inflated the boat with a low-pressure air hose from the submarine, stowed gear, checked equipment, readied the engine and prepared to insert. Submariners retrieved the air hose and secured the hatch as the sub submerged beneath them, the entire dry-deck launch taking less than two minutes.

Thirteen to 15 miles might seem like a long sea traverse onto enemy shores except for the

COVERT CHRONICLER

Vietnam veteran John Dwyer has written frequently of Navy special warfare operations for *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine. His previous articles include "Surface Action," May '87; "Swamp Warrior," December '86; "UDTs in Korea," September '86, and a history of the Navy's SEAL Teams, "SEAL Saga," October '85.



ABOVE: USS *Shark* (SSN-591), underway in the Atlantic, landed and recovered SEAL teams in tandem missions with her sister ship USS *Sculpin*. Photo: U.S. Navy



LEFT: Khadafi's Libya, the target of U.S. cover and deception operations in the spring and summer of 1986.

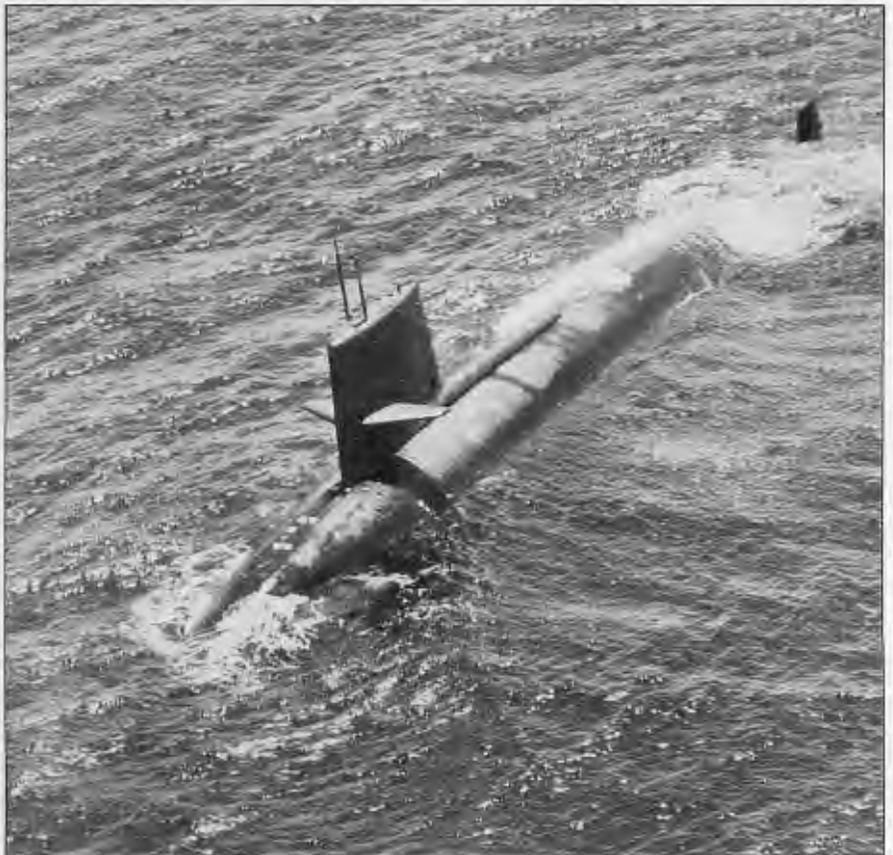


fact that the Zodiac's surface-hugging shape is a proven coastal radar defater and SEALs routinely practice such insertions out of Naval Special Warfare Unit Four's base at Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico.

Having gained the beach after being vectored into the insertion point by coded bursts, the SEALs used local concealment materials to hide the boat. To give Libyan radar more targets and movement, operation controllers convinced willing, friendly area merchant ships to take a more southerly course, angling them toward the Libyan coast. After the first several such insertions, SEALs made it a practice to check for tire tracks on the sandy beach to gauge Libyan patrol schedules for future reference.

The SEALs then set about what was actually their primary task: gathering updated information on and photographing antiaircraft and missile-battery installations and munitions storage depots. The first two parts of their mission were essential since the types of radar and geographic positions of such weapons systems must be known to plan future, effective electronic countermeasures if another U.S. air raid were to be carried out.

The deception was executed by such actions and ruses as planting Israeli- and Syrian-brand cigarette butts, matchboxes and U.S. Kleenex tissues. SEALs placed light





ABOVE: Crouching low in their Zodiac equipped with a muffled Mercury outboard engine, these SEALs are outbound after completing their mission ashore. Practice missions such as the one pictured here prepare SEALs for such operations as the covert deception operation they conducted inside Libya from May to October 1986. Photo: Peter D. Sundberg

LEFT: Nuclear-powered attack submarine USS *Sculpin* (SSN-590) shown here was one of the boats used to insert and extract SEALs in Zodiac boats from Libyan shores. In 1965, while under the command of Commander Don Fears, the *Sculpin* became the first nuclear-powered submarine to launch and recover SEAL combat swimmers. Photo: U.S. Navy

explosive charges on power lines and telephone poles, alternately using Soviet Type-21 and similar Israeli charges. While some were detonated, others were soaked in seawater and left in place. Those, along with detonators conveniently left behind, were meant to be found by the Libyans.

If anyone chanced to catch a glimpse of the shadowy forms of SEALs in the night, the only thing observed would have been unidentified commandos carrying Soviet and Israeli weapons. Over the course of the operation a source quoted in Winner's arti-

cle said: "At one point they [the Libyans] even suspected the Russians." This shows that an important aspect of any deception operation — feedback — was available to controllers from a source inside Libya who reported on the effectiveness of the effort. The time factor is also crucial for any deception activity, for it allows the strategic and tactical ruses and ploys to mix and coalesce into an ever more believable, but false, "big picture."

Upon mission completion, before dawn, the four- to six-man SEAL elements returned to the beach, uncovered their Zodiac and put out to sea on the planned magnetic heading. At the preset time they arrived at the rendezvous point 14 miles offshore. Patrolling nearby, the *Sculpin* or *Shark* surfaced and, in a reverse of the launch procedure, quickly recovered SEALs and Zodiac, submerged, then steamed back to La Madalena or Palau. Mission accomplished.

The six-month operation was shut down following U.S. press reports of a "disinformation campaign" aimed at Libya's Khadaffi, but by that time it had pretty much run its course and accomplished its objective. In the months following the raid Khadaffi had, for all intents and purposes, disappeared and was reported to be in hiding "somewhere in the desert."

Besides the fact that the extended SEAL

deception operation was so successful, it is notable for another factor: It remained a *kept* secret longer than its strategic counterpart. Only after its completion a year later did any details about it appear in the press. Planners and commanders now have an even better idea of what techniques to employ to ensure operational security for any such future endeavor. In this case that meant keeping the operation secret even from the commander of the U.S. 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean.

Strategic and tactical cover and deception operations, like all special operations, should only be conducted after a well thought-out and thorough planning process by those who know and understand the nature and limitations of such efforts. Perhaps most important, as the Libyan deception illustrates, they must be very tightly controlled operations. When properly planned and executed, cover and deception operations can reap major strategic and/or tactical benefits with a minimum utilization of assets.

Far from being some kind of underhanded "dirty trick," deception, as a component of our national strategy, adds to deterrence, bolsters our national security and may ultimately result in saving American lives. And as was proven in the Libyan deception, it can even deter terrorist attacks. ✕

SPAIN'S ~~FOREIGN~~ LEGION

End of an Era for Professional Adventurers

Text & Photos by Ron Hill

IT was one of those nasty little wars politicians love to start but can't seem to agree upon how to end; one of those inconvenient little conflicts that was killing the country's youth and future in a hothouse hellhole of a country overseas. It was 1920, and Spain, for centuries a world military power, was being beaten and embarrassed in her fight to retain her rights to what was then called the Spanish Sahara and Spanish Morocco.

In Madrid the pressure increased as the body count grew, but economic considerations, territorial imperatives and national pride kept the Spanish from backing down. When Colonel José Milán Astrá y approached the Ministry of Defense with the idea of a combat force composed of convicted criminals, renegades, foreigners and other "undesirables," they embraced the plan wholeheartedly, and the Spanish Foreign Legion was born.

"Each criminal in many Spanish jails was given a choice," says Colonel Benito Moñita, commanding officer of Cuarto Tercio, the Legion's training battalion in Ronda, Spain. They

ABOVE RIGHT: Since its inception in 1920, the Spanish Foreign Legion has not marched or walked anywhere — whenever a unit moves it moves at double-time. Here legionnaires carry 7.62x51mm NATO CETME Model 'C' battle rifles.

could join the newly formed Legion for duty (read "slaughter") in Morocco or face execution or worse. Understandably many, if not most, of them chose the Legion. Enlistment was easy and open to everyone, with no questions asked. Like its French predecessor, upon which it was based, Spain's newest armed force provided anonymity to men escaping their past via *noms de guerre* and began with an inordinate number of "José

Ghana native *Cabo Primero* Bright Amishadee Addo joined the Legion for the money and the adventure; now, he says, he doesn't get enough of one and almost none of the other.

SPANISH EXCLUSIVE

Author Ron Hill is a six-year veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and five-year veteran of the U.S. Navy. He served more than two years with the Corps' First Force Recon Company in Vietnam during the mid-60s and five years as a Navy photojournalist and member of the combat camera team in Spain, Honduras and El Salvador until 1986.

According to sources in the Spanish Defense Ministry and the Foreign Legion headquarters, Hill is the only journalist, Spanish or foreign, ever allowed inside the Legion to photograph and write about its operations. There are no plans to ever allow another.

Dissatisfied with what he considers the undisciplined, "second-best" attitude of today's U.S. Navy, Hill left the service and is currently a private detective and freelance photojournalist in Orlando, Florida. This is his first article for SOF.





TO BE A LEGIONNAIRE

It's 1000 hours and *Cabo Primero* Bright Amishadee Addo, his desert-gray uniform already soaked with sweat, eases down into the small patch of shade under the overhang of the mess hall roof. He's only got about 15 minutes to eat his steak sandwich and drink his beer, one of the four meals a Spanish foreign legionnaire is given each day, before he goes back on duty. He's agreed to spend some of those precious minutes talking about himself, the Legion and his impressions of it.

"I was born in Ghana," Addo begins in heavily accented English. "I lived with my mother, father, brother and three sisters and I thought there must be something better. I left home and worked my way to the Ivory Coast. I am a carpenter by trade."

The heat of the summer morning in southern Spain is oppressive, but Addo's ebony features remain dry and composed between swigs of his Cruzcampo and bites of his sandwich as he thinks back.

"Carpentry was very poor work in the Ivory Coast, too, and I had to find something else to do. I had heard of the French Foreign Legion, of course," Addo says almost offhandedly. "They had served a lot in Africa and I knew they accepted foreigners, so I decided to join them." That was nearly eight years ago and Addo never made it. He left the Ivory Coast by ship, landing in the port of Málaga, Spain.

"When I got here I tried to get a visa to go to France, but they wouldn't give me one," Addo says. "Then I heard about the Spanish Foreign Legion and it sounded like good money and a lot of adventure, so I joined up."

As with any new recruit, Addo's first enlistment was for three years, but he has re-upped several times after that for one year at a time. Is the Legion all he thought it would be?

"No, it's not," he states without any hesitation. "Before I joined, I thought the Legion would be a lot harder and

more adventurous than it is. I'm stationed in the 3rd Bandera at Fuente Ventura in the Canary Islands with other foreign legionnaires, and we hardly ever go anywhere. There is no one to fight, nothing adventurous to do." His disgust is evident, despite the fact that several Legion officers are clustered around listening to the interview. He doesn't know whether any of them can speak English or not. "I really don't care," he shrugs.

Compared to what Addo was making in Ghana, the 50,000 *pesetas* a month he earns as a *cabo primero* (corporal first class, or E-4), which is about \$435 American, looks very good. It looked so good a couple of years ago that he married a Spanish girl and has taken Spanish citizenship. With all that security under his belt, he's being driven to "climb the corporate ladder."

"I'm trying for promotion to sergeant now," he mentions as he flicks the small ball of wax paper that had wrapped his sandwich into the dust of the parade ground. "I've got enough time-in-grade and I've passed my sergeant's courses, but there is no opening available." That means a lot more to a legionnaire than an American soldier, since there is no "frocking" in the Legion — no promotion until the opening exists. Addo is optimistic. He thinks he'll get his stripe within the next year.

Time is up, the interview over and Addo's unit is forming up in the hot Spanish sun, rifles at the order. "Four years after that," he grunts, getting up and picking up his weapon, "I'll be eligible for *sargento primero* and," he smiles tiredly, "after that, who knows?"

Bright Addo is a "good troop," according to his company commander; he's disciplined, professional and expert in his specialty. He should go far in the Legion.

For a young lad with the stars of adventure in his eye, it has been a long way from Ghana to the *cuartel* of the Spanish Foreign Legion. Addo made the trip, but it's obvious when talking to him that most of the stars were lost somewhere along the way.



Utilitarian gray, designed originally for desert camouflage during the Moroccan war, is the Legion's working uniform and combat uniform all in one. Red and gold lanyard turns it into "parade dress."

Gonzálezés," "Pablo Gómezes" and "John Smiths" on its rolls and no money for weapons or equipment.

Today, 67 years later, a fiery pride born of that unorthodox beginning and the Legion's heroic past remains, but little else would be recognizable to an original *obligatorio*. As in the

beginning, the Legion is still banned by Spanish law from operations inside Spain (except for training and the Legion's role as shock troops in the Spanish Civil War) but it is no longer open to foreign enlistment or commission.

[Editor's Note: A law which went into effect in 1986 requires that to be in any branch of the Spanish military you must be a

SPANISH FOREIGN LEGION CHRONOLOGY

- 1920 — Founded by Lieutenant Colonel José Milán Astráy.
- The Legion was to be a separate unit with its own administration, supply corps and officer cadres, based partly on the French Foreign Legion, which Milán Astráy studied. The Legion was seen as a way of reducing conscription demands in Spain for the unpopular Moroccan conflict. Francisco Franco, future Spanish dictator, was named second in command.
- 1920-1926 — During the Moroccan campaign, the Legion fought in 845 engagements.
- 1936-1939 — During the Spanish Civil War, the Legion was the vanguard of the army of Africa, which crushed republican resistance with ruthless efficiency. After the civil war, the Legion reverted to its former role as a colonial army, guarding Spain's remaining African possessions.
- Mid-1950s — Spain started extensive oil exploration in Northern Africa. In 1959 it found the world's largest untapped phosphate deposit, which prompted Morocco to renew historic claims to Ifni, a tiny Saharan enclave just

SPANISH LEGION TODAY

SOF recently spoke with a senior Spanish Legion officer in Spain about the current roles and organization of the unit. He requested his name not be used.

SOF: What is the official name of your group?

OFFICIAL: The official name is simply "La Legión." Historically it has been called other names, but it is currently named "La Legión."

SOF: What is the primary mission of the Legion?

OFFICIAL: We and the Airborne Brigade constitute the nucleus of the special units of the Spanish army. We carry out any mission for which we are trained and maintain a permanent group of units in the garrisons of Ceuta and Melilla [Spanish enclaves on the northern shore of Morocco].

SOF: Is a major part of your mission to keep Ceuta and Melilla Spanish?

OFFICIAL: We protect Ceuta and Melilla. The units that are there are under the control of the general commandant of each city.

SOF: Is the Legion a separate service — not directly under the command of the regular army?

OFFICIAL: No. The entire Legion, all its units, is under the control of the Army General Staff in all respects. It is not, for example, like the American Marines; that is, part of the Navy but with its own chain of command. This has often been misinterpreted by the press. We are completely under the control of the army.

SOF: In order to join the Legion, is it necessary to be a Spanish citizen?

OFFICIAL: Yes, that is true.

SOF: Has that always been true?

OFFICIAL: No, it has been true only since the military service law of 8 June 1984 went into effect. That's when the recruitment of foreign nationals was stopped. The Royal Decree establishing the actual regulations regarding military

service wasn't issued until 21 March 1986.

SOF: Do you have any idea of the motives for changing the law?

OFFICIAL: No. It was a political decision made in Madrid, debated by the Parliament. But I don't know what the real reasons were — what it was that caused them to suppress the recruitment of foreign nationals.

SOF: What is your opinion of the change?

OFFICIAL: Well, I think most of the legionnaires were happy with things the way they were. I don't know the reasons that caused people at the level of Parliament where the laws are made to want to change. But they didn't consult us and I'm reasonably certain that the proposal to change did not originate with the Legion itself.

SOF: Were there foreigners who were already serving in the Legion when the law changed?

OFFICIAL: Yes, there were.

SOF: What happened to them?

OFFICIAL: They retained their positions and all their rights. They were allowed to continue their service.

SOF: How many foreigners are currently serving in the Legion?

OFFICIAL: I think there are slightly over 300, maybe 320-330 at the present time.

SOF: Are there any Americans?

OFFICIAL: There is one. A corporal first-class. That's the highest level in the rank and file. He is attached to the 4th Tercio in Ronda.

SOF: Where do the others come from?

OFFICIAL: Actually the foreign members currently come from a total of 67 countries.

SOF: How can a Spaniard join the Legion? What do you need to do?

OFFICIAL: Well, you have to present yourself at a recruitment center in your province [Spain has 50 provinces] and show that you are eligible by proving that your age is right [currently the age limit is between 17 and 23]. Then you have to undergo and pass a series of physical and

citizen of Spain. Foreigners who are already in the Legion may stay in as long as they want, until retirement if so desired. Officially, Legion officers state that they are complying with the law and have no opinion as to whether it is good for the Legion or not. An SOF contact in the Spanish embassy said that the man in the street probably doesn't know or care about who

south of Morocco on the west coast of Africa and the Spanish Sahara. Moroccan irregulars invaded these regions on camels and assaulted legionnaire outposts on camels. During one attack, 87 legionnaires and their captain made a gallant last stand against overwhelming numbers at Edchara in the Spanish Sahara and died to the last man.

- 1960s — The Legion attracted fewer hard-core professionals and instead drew volunteers who sought an interesting alternative to routine compulsory military service. Among foreigners, the Legion still attracted an adventurous element, including former French legionnaires and a few white mercenaries from the Congo's civil wars of the 1960s.
- 1969 — Morocco assumed control of Ifni.
- 1976 — The Spanish Sahara was ceded to Morocco and Mauritania. When the Legion left the Sahara, Spain's colonial era ended.
- 1984 — Military Service Law stopped recruitment of foreign nationals.
- 1986 — Royal Decree banned foreigners from the Legion, although those already in it could remain until they wanted to leave. This marked the end of a colorful era in Spanish military history.

can serve in the Legion, but for old soldiers this is a sad end to an honorable tradition in the Spanish military.

For the determined there is, of course, a way around the law. A foreigner can become a citizen of Spain immediately by marrying a Spanish citizen. Otherwise you have to live in Spain for two years as a registered resident, which is difficult since you must be able to prove that you can support yourself without working in Spain during that waiting period. At the end of the two-year waiting period you can apply for Spanish citizenship. Then as a Spanish citizen you would be eligible to join the Legion.]

And there are no more "Pablo Gómezes." If you're a criminal on the run, have a history of drug problems or health trouble of any kind, don't waste the Legion's time — you won't be accepted. As Moñita says, "The Legion has become a body of professionals." Applications from new recruits are accepted only at bandera headquarters in Ceuta and Melilla (North Africa), Fuente Ventura (Canary Islands) and Ronda (mainland Spain).

The basic recruit spends eight weeks in boot camp being drilled in the manual of arms, armed and unarmed combat, and rifle, pistol and grenade marksmanship. Once a recruit graduates he (there are no women in Spain's armed forces) takes the rank of *legionario*, equivalent to the rank of private in the U.S. military, and is shipped out to Africa or the Canary Islands where he'll begin training in his specialty. In three months he is promoted, on merit alone, to *legionario primera clase* (PFC). Six months later he can be elevated to *cabo*, or corporal, and from then on an opening has to exist before he can advance, which means someone above him has to die, retire

psychological tests. You also must show that you have not already completed your military service.

SOF: Then you are signed up?

OFFICIAL: Once your application is approved you sign a provisional contract and, after you have served a probationary period, you sign a permanent contract.

SOF: How many soldiers total are currently in the Legion?

OFFICIAL: Approximately 6,000.

SOF: What military activities are you currently carrying out?

OFFICIAL: Since we are basically a volunteer unit we have a special program of training and instruction. And we also carry out all the same operations and activities that the regular army does.

SOF: Is the Legion actually only volunteers? Who are the "obligatorios"?

OFFICIAL: Well, a Spanish male has obligatory military service and he may choose to fulfill that in the Legion if he meets the standards. But that is always a voluntary choice — no one is drafted into the Legion. I emphasize that absolutely all members of the Legion have volunteered for it. There has occasionally been some confusion about that, so I want to make sure it's clear.

SOF: How is the Legion organized?

OFFICIAL: We are organized in units which are similar to the regular army but we use different names for them. We have four "tercios," which are approximately equivalent to a regiment, and each of those is divided into two "banderas," which are more or less equivalent to a battalion and have between six and seven hundred men. It depends on their specific composition — they are not all the same size. The names come from the names used by the Spanish army in its wars in the Low Countries. [Tercio means one-third and bandera means flag in Spanish. The Spanish fought in the Low Countries in the 16th century.]

SOF: What weapons does the Legion use?

OFFICIAL: The Legion has various heterogeneous units

It has mechanized units — two banderas. They use the most advanced transport of the Spanish army, the armored BMR.

SOF: Do you have artillery?

OFFICIAL: No. The heaviest weapon we use is the infantry's 120mm mortar. We have two motorized banderas with many kinds of motorized vehicles. We have all the same arms as the Spanish regular army — antitank missiles and recoilless cannons, for example. Then there is a Special Operations bandera made up entirely of paratroopers. Finally there is a cavalry unit which has four-wheeled armed vehicles. Basically we have all the same weapons as the regular army in Spain.

You can obtain further information by writing the Spanish Army Public Relations office in care of:

Teniente Coronel Jesús García Muñoz
Jefe de la Oficina de Relaciones Públicas
del Cuartel General del Ejército
Madrid, Spain

— Ralph Kite

REACHING OUT REAL EARLY

Reaching out to a Legion spokesman in Spain turned out to be an eye-opener for our Spanish talker, Ralph Kite. On our first attempt at 1300 hours on Wednesday, we reached a desk sargento who said call back in the morning Spanish time, which is seven hours ahead of the United States. Not wanting to get up in the middle of the night to make a call to Spain, Kite started calling at 0615 (1315 in Spain) and finally got through to an officer at 0815 for the first interview. He tried for a follow-up on Friday at 0740 only to be told: "Hombre, it's 20 minutes to three on Friday, there's nobody here. They've all gone home." Undaunted, Kite, who as a university Spanish professor and frequent traveler to Spain knows the Españoles' mañana mind-set well, finally did the honorable thing and got up at 0300 (1000 in Spain) to get through on Monday. Later than that and it would have been siesta time. Nice hours if you can get 'em.

— The Editors

or leave the Legion. If he's lucky, in 20 years he can be commissioned a *subteniente* (a cross between a sergeant major and a second lieutenant — if that makes any sense) and be bringing in as much as 100,000 *pesetas* (about \$860) a month in salary. A legionnaire can retire at age 58 after 20 years' service, but if he doesn't advance above the rank of *cabo* by the time he's 45, he's out. There is no "frocking" or brevetting (honorable commission without a raise in pay or authority) since the Legion is strictly structured and rigidly controlled as to size.

"Right now we have around 7,000 legionnaires," says *Capitán* José Lázares, "with about 10 to 15 percent of our force composed of foreigners, but that amount varies slightly depending on recruiting and losses." Recruiting doesn't mean quite the same thing in Spain that it does in America, however. The Spanish Foreign Legion is in no danger of dying out for lack of applicants, since every Spanish male is required to serve 18 months of active military service upon reaching his 18th birthday, and a certain number of those draftees or *obligatorios* volunteer for the Legion rather than serve in the army, navy, air force or marine infantry.

An *obligatorio* is completely cared for during that 18 months and is given housing, food, clothing, cigarettes (whether he smokes or not) and other necessities. He earns approximately 600 *pesetas* (about \$5.00) a month in cash. If he is married, his wife is out of luck because Spain doesn't provide for dependents' care. If he re-ups after that 18 months, however,



"WITH EVERY COURTESY AND ASSISTANCE"

After nearly six months of official photography for the Spanish admiral in charge of one of the country's largest naval bases, I happened to make the offhand comment that I'd never heard much about the Spanish Foreign Legion and would sure like to see their operations and write a story about them. The admiral acted as though he didn't hear me, but his executive officer, called *El Segundo*, apparently did, as he winced slightly and turned his head away. Almost a year to the day later I was summoned to the admiral's office by a rather cryptic phone call from the exec.

"*El almirante* has your papers and would like to see you immediately," the executive officer said crisply. What papers he was referring to I had no idea, since I had all but forgotten my comment and had temporarily shelved my ambition toward the Legion story. I had been told by several high-ranking Spanish military officers that, on orders from Madrid, no stories had ever been done on the Legion; to take a camera inside a Legion camp or photograph a legionnaire was punishable by a long term in prison.

I was a little nervous as I was escorted into the admiral's office, but he smiled and informed me in aristocratic Castilian that he was very sorry my request had taken so long to act upon, but better late than never. He handed me a simple teletype dispatch originating with the commanding general of the Spanish Foreign Legion and addressed to any and all Legion officers, wherever they may be. It read: "This is to introduce *Sargento* Ron Hill, an American military photojournalist, who is to be extended every courtesy and assistance in his efforts to write a story about the Legion. He is expressly permitted the possession and use of cameras and recording equipment."

I was dismissed after managing a mumbled "thank you" and taken in hand by the *segundo*, who wasted no time confirming the date or dates I wanted to travel to Legion headquarters in Ronda and calling the colonel in charge to set it up. Just before I left his office, *segundo* shook his head slightly and told me, "Without *almirante's* connections this would never have been possible. The Legion is very, very private."

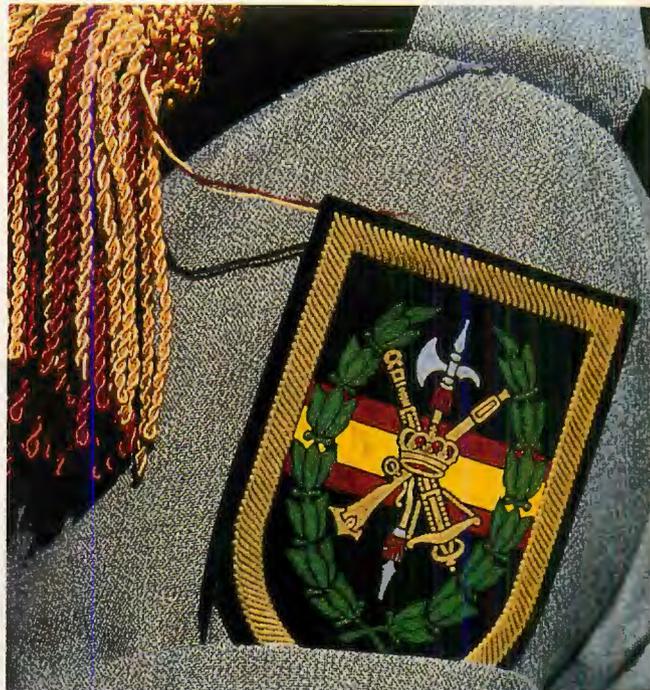
Armed with the official pass, my 17-year-old son and I

rolled up to the thick concrete portals of the Legion barracks at Ronda about a week later. I realized right away that getting out of the truck with my cameras over my shoulder was a mistake, as bolts slid home with ominous "clacks" and both of us found ourselves looking at the business ends of Legion rifles. Although I had spent two years in Vietnam and had reported stories on six continents in as many combat zones, this was the first time I had run into a situation where I felt that raising my hands slowly over my head and keeping them plainly in view was definitely not melodramatic.

Neither guard would say a word after the initial "*Alto!*" or respond to my hasty explanations and assurances. Neither one of them took his eyes off us for a second. It felt like at least four years later (it was actually less than 30 seconds) when the sergeant of the guard appeared behind the concertina, cautioning me to remain still and state my business. I carefully handed over the teletype introduction and my Spanish ID card, and he disappeared into the guard shack.

I was beginning to get a bit paranoid and to think I'd been set up when the sergeant ran out of the shack and yelled to the guards that I was cleared. He almost broke his wrist getting the gates open and apologizing for the treatment but, he explained, the whole barracks was on edge. An intruder had gotten through their perimeter wire the week before and had been shot and wounded by a guard. As it turned out, the intruder was a local farmer looking for a stray cow. The farmer should have known better, but he was beginning to cause trouble asking for compensation. The guards were taking no chances this day since their comrade of the previous week was now awaiting court-martial for his actions. No, not for wounding the intruder, but for not killing him outright. I checked this story later and found it to be true — Legion guards shoot to kill, not wound.

We were directed politely to the top of the bluff and the city of Ronda itself, where the colonel-in-charge was located. There a colorful, hard-bitten Legion veteran of 20 years, *Teniente* Antonio Ortega Navarro, chief of the military police, saluted and introduced himself as our "guide" for the day. Typical of any good journalist, my initial reaction was, "Right! Guide or censor, my friend?" If I had said it out loud instead of just shaking hands and



introducing myself I'm sure our visit would have been much shorter, much more formal and a lot less informative.

Teniente Navarro knew the Legion inside out, from its inception to the present, and very obviously had no restrictions given to him for our visit. After the obligatory meeting and interview with the colonel and executive officer, Navarro loosened his field scarf, tipped his cap out of regulation and left it completely up to us as to where we wanted to go and whom we wanted to talk to. Being a typical journalist/cynic I figured I'd find out right away just how far "every courtesy and assistance" went and told him flat out, "Boot camp." Navarro never batted an eye. This time when we pulled up to the concrete and concertina portal outside the training area we were met with salutes instead of rifles.

From recruit training to a Legion barracks, from the enlisted club to the brig, from the officers' mess to the armory to the highly secure special operations units' offices we went, with liberal and frequent Navarro-suggested stops at roadside bars, "just to shake the dust of the parade ground," he explained each time in his thick Andalusian dialect. Throughout the day it became gradually apparent that Navarro never had to worry about body armor; any bullet hitting that gut would come out second best. It was also made abundantly clear that any legionnaire foolish enough to be half a beat slow with a salute or not show the proper courtesy to the "Legion's guests" came out far worse than second — Navarro was the epitome of the no-nonsense professional warrior proud of his unit and anxious to finally be able to show it off.

Before we left that evening Navarro and *Capitán* José Lázares informed us that the colonel would immediately arrange for our transportation and billeting in any of the Legion outposts in North Africa or the Canary Islands if we would just let him know when we wished to go. It was an unheard of, unprecedented offer and Navarro privately insisted that we take the colonel up on it. "Out in the field is where the Legion is really the Legion," he advised. They were disappointed, although not half so much as I was, when I had to decline temporarily due to time and work pressures. The trip is still pending and I'm determined to report on the Legion in the field as soon as I can get away.

ABOVE LEFT: On rare occasions, such as the Legion's anniversary, the drum and bugle corps of the *Bandera Segunda*, based in North Africa, gives public performances.

ABOVE: Spanish Foreign Legion shoulder patch and *aguillette* (ornamental cord worn on the shoulder) are displayed proudly by legionnaire on parade in Ronda.

BELOW: Member of the Spanish Foreign Legion's crack drill team, *Escuadra de Gastadores*, which literally translated means "Sapper Squadron," holds 7.62x51mm NATO CETME Model 'C' battle rifle.



the story changes dramatically.

"Legionarios are paid 16,000 pesetas (about \$140) a month plus their clothing, housing and four meals a day," says Teniente Antonio Ortega Navarro, head of the Legion's military police. "They are given breakfast, a mid-morning snack, lunch and dinner." The day's menu cards explicitly state that each legionnaire will have sandwiches and champagne at mid-morning; meat, fish, fruit, coffee, bread, butter and sherry for lunch; and meat, fish, vegetables and fruit, bread and butter, dessert and cognac for dinner. Every evening the cook prepares many different courses and takes them to the commanding officer on a silver tray with silver covers over each dish. He samples the dishes and chooses the *cena* (evening meal) menu for the troops. The evening meal is formal. When the Legion deploys, the menu is, of necessity, trimmed, but the troops still eat very well.

Promotion through the ranks used to be based on strength and survival. Today's Legion has its own university, the *Academia de Mando Legionarios* in the port city of Málaga, that functions

as a correspondence school. "Before you can be promoted," says Navarro, "each rank has its own courses you have to pass successfully such as topography, ordnance, tactics, military morals and so forth. As you go up in rank the courses get harder and harder."

Those legionnaires who show outstanding abilities and physical qualities are offered a chance to join one of three companies of the *Unidad de Operaciones Especiales* (UOE) — the Legion's force recon or SEAL Teams. These units, much as their American counterparts, are highly secret, specially trained guerrilla fighters. Again, as with their American counterparts who train with them in Africa or Spain on a regular basis, each man's dedication has to be unswerving. According to Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Lucas González, the head of special operations, the teams spend 10 months a year in the field, living out of their packs and off the land, returning to base camp in Ronda only for resupply. The day of the interview with González, companies one and two were preparing their plan of operations for a joint assault on Grenada in conjunction with the

JOURNAL OF A LEGIONNAIRE

This is an excerpt from the journal of a young Spaniard who joined the Spanish Foreign Legion in search of adventure. In the early 1940s, shortly after his 17th birthday, Juan Argenta-Rodriguez enlisted and was sent to Legion headquarters in Dar Riffien, North Africa. Months went by and tension began to grow between the Spanish and the Moroccans.

A few weeks passed by and then it was discovered that numbers of Moroccan Arabs were standing about outside of our fort, talking together, whilst observing everything. They had camels and donkeys with them and would remain for days at a time, even erecting their tents in the surrounding fields and at close range.

The legionnaires weren't at all happy about this. There was the distinct smell of trouble. And in fact it was the beginning of an Arab revolution against the Spanish government. They were requesting the return of their land which we had won from them many years previously. The land which they were asking for was El Ayún, Cabo Jubi, Villacisneros, Rio de Oro and other parts.

Our colonel gave us orders, through our officer, to go out and tell the Arabs to dismantle their tents and disperse. Also not to come again, the way they had been doing. So two or three groups of legionnaires on horses, with their officer in command and accompanied by some legionnaires on foot, approached the Arabs and conveyed this message to them by force, pushing them away and breaking up their tents.

Having done this, we then returned to the fort and were immediately summoned by the bugler signalling us to assemble. This was a general assembly with all legionnaires on full alert and armed. Our colonel was addressing us from a platform, informing us that the Moroccan government had declared war in their territory. Tomorrow, he continued, there would be ships arriving in Ceuta from Spain, and they would be on full alert to take three banderas of legionnaires of the 2nd Tercio to El Ayún.

Company officers then gave instructions to their legionnaires to prepare the ammunition, food, medical supplies and extra clothing, etc., for transportation on the lorries to Ceuta, which were then in turn to be loaded onto the waiting ships.

On the following day we were told that the legionnaires of the 4th, 5th, 6th and 19th Banderas were to board the lorries, destination Ceuta. On our arrival there we numbered in all about 500 legionnaires. The next step in the procedure was to climb the gangplank of our ship.

I traveled with my company on the *Gran Canaria*, and the

other ships were named *Almirante Cervera* and *Miguel de Cervantes*. The other ships' names evade me at the moment. What I recall vividly was the atmosphere. The legionnaires, myself included, were gearing ourselves up mentally for action of the real kind.

We were two days at sea before arriving at our destination, which was Cabo Jubi, where we disembarked to travel by lorry to El Ayún, desert country and very hot.

At this place, which resembled an oasis, was a Spanish regular army garrison. Other companies of legionnaires were sent to other places, such as Villacisneros, Cabo Jubi and Rio de Oro.

We quickly organized ourselves, erecting tents, our sleeping bunks, etc., and taking position on guard. We passed one or two weeks without seeing any Arabs, but then, out on patrol one day, about 30 of our group of legionnaires spotted a caravan of camels with Arabs walking through the desert, 200 yards or so away from us. There were 20 camels carrying merchandise on their backs. We approached them and stopped their caravan. Our officer then ordered us to divide ourselves into separate groups with one half of the legionnaires to keep a lookout whilst the others checked the packs on the camels' backs. On inspection rifles were discovered along with ammunition, food, tobacco and other things.

There were two Arabs with each camel. One with a whip and the other holding onto a rope which was attached to the camel's head.

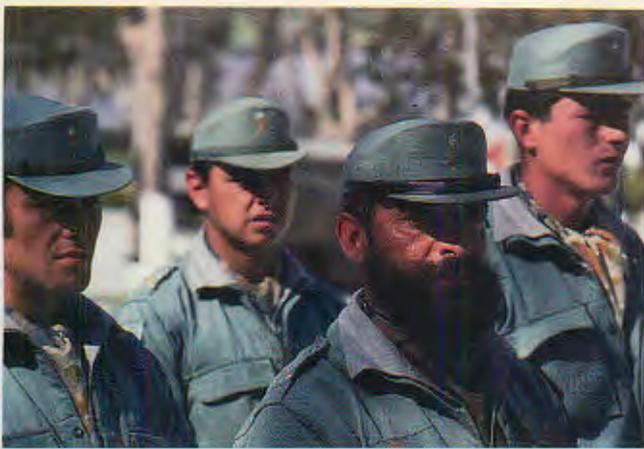
Another group of Arabs, about 50 this time, on horseback, came riding toward us, shooting at us and shouting. Immediately the legionnaires activated the machine guns and opened fire on them, as the Arabs obviously meant war. Horses and Arabs went to the ground whilst others fled to take cover. They were intimidated by our sophisticated weapons, which they couldn't match with only rifles in their possession.

Having positioned ourselves to advantage we proceeded to pound the enemy nonstop for around 15 minutes with our machine-gun fire. In exchange we were receiving their rifle fire.

Realizing that they couldn't win, the Arabs soon decided to throw down their inadequate weapons and sheepishly came forward waving a white cloth which was hoisted on top of their rifles.

We legionnaires were not to be easily conned. Knowing the cunning of the Arabs by this time, we held our positions without moving. Also, our officer in charge warned us to be careful, as it could be a bit of trickery by the Moroccans.

Twenty Arabs now came toward us holding both of their hands up in the air, a gesture of genuine surrender. The



Unlike the American forces, the Legion still allows beards and personal-taste hair styles.

U.S. Navy's SEAL Team 2, the SEAL strike force. Trained in parachuting, demolition, underwater demolition and search-and-destroy, long-range reconnaissance, small arms, unarmed combat, knife fighting and sabotage as well as communications and survival, members of the UOE are seldom seen and never interviewed.

The Legion's job, its only job, is to protect Spain's interests and fight her battles overseas. Today there are legionnaires from Spain, Ghana, Guyana, England, Italy, Morocco, China and the United States stationed in Ceuta, Melilla, Fuente Ventura, Ronda and Málaga. The Legion remains essentially what it has been for the past 67 years, but it will no longer be one of the last organized options for the freelance merc.

The new law has closed the door on a colorful and heroic era in military history, an era whose fiery tradition blazes across the banners of the Spanish Foreign Legion: *Legionarios a Luchar, Legionarios a Morir* — Legionnaires to the Fight, Legionnaires to the Death! ✂

frightened camels and horses were disappearing into the distance by this time. As for the Arabs who had arrived with the first caravan of camels, they were all lying face down, flat on the ground. Scattered around were the dead bodies of some Arabs and also many badly injured horses which we had to shoot to put out of their suffering.

We had radioed for reinforcements when the firing commenced and now they were here. Jeeps and legionnaires on horses had come to our assistance, but by this time the fighting was actually over, with three of our legionnaires wounded. Two of them had caught a bullet in the arm and the other a bullet in his leg. There were wounded men among the Arabs also.

Our officer in charge ordered the wounded men to be taken to hospital without delay. They were transported in the jeep to our military hospital at El Ayún, the wounded Arabs included, as some of these had been shot many times and were bleeding profusely.

The newly arrived legionnaires on horseback were instructed to go collect the stray animals, including the camels with the merchandise, and bring them back to where we were. When this task was completed the Arabs were then ordered to take charge of those belonging to them.

All the Spanish legionnaires and the prisoners then walked back to the garrison at El Ayún. This had been one of several similar attacks on the legionnaires in this territory.

A few months passed and then a complete company of legionnaires, 200 in all, set out on a reconnaissance trip in this same area. During the night they were ambushed by more than 1,000 Arabs who killed every one of the legionnaires, including officers. It was thought that the legionnaire guards had been overpowered under cover of darkness before having the opportunity of giving the alarm to their sleeping comrades.

I considered myself fortunate not to have been in the company of legionnaires of that particular bandera. Three days went by, none of those legionnaires returned and it was obvious that something extraordinary was wrong.

The next morning my company went to search for the missing men. We had walked between six and seven miles before encountering the ill-fated company of slaughtered legionnaires all over the ground. Every last one of them dead, either from mutilation or from having been shot.

After witnessing this horrible massacre there were legionnaires in my outfit who were showing more emotion than I had previously seen. But after the sadness came a different feeling. A terrible anger swept over all of us and what we wanted now was revenge. Legionnaires of my bandera were shouting to the officers that they wanted a white card from now on. This meant license to kill outright.

Not merely to wound the enemy nor to take prisoners but to kill everyone. Our officer in charge knew exactly how we were feeling as he was just as angry and saddened by the sight of so many brave legionnaires, no less than we were.

But orders had to be obtained by General Franco and sent to us by message. No such permission of this kind was granted to the legionnaires before two weeks had elapsed. Previous to this we had radioed to El Ayún to send 25 lorries so that we could bring the dead legionnaires back to the garrison. It was a very busy time with so many funeral arrangements to be made and also having to dig the graves in the ground which surrounded the garrison. This was a cemetery for only the legionnaires, and an around the clock guard was kept.

At the burials the legionnaires' priest said the appropriate words and all legionnaires presented arms in a solemn fashion, kneeling on the ground with our bayonets fixed to our rifles.

After this we were ordered by our officer to stand to attention and replace our bayonet in its sheath and then to lift our rifle 45 degrees skyward to give a three-shot salute as a last sign of respect to the dead legionnaires. The officer then ordered all the legionnaires to stand to attention and to sing "The Death of the Legionnaire." These are the words:

He was so brave and fearless, he signed on in the Legion.
Nobody knew in the tercio, who was that legionnaire.
Like a wolf bite in his heart.

I am engaged to the dead, and I can't escape it.
I am engaged to the dead, that go to unite with strong and
sincere companions.

When the firing was fierce, and the fighting was hard,
Defending his flag, the legionnaire went forward.
Without fear of the enemy's aggression, he knew how to die
so bravely.

His identification recovered, when they took his body from
the ground,

At the end of the final battle, inside his chest, they found,
A letter and a photograph of a beautiful woman.
The letter said, "If one day God should call you,
To myself, I vow, that I will go in search of you."
With his life's blood pouring on the hot ground,
The delirious legionnaire said in a low voice,
"I am engaged to the dead, and I go to unite with my strong
and true companion."

Legionnaires to the fight, legionnaires to the death.

Everyone felt sad as they returned to their respective posts after such an occasion. In the days and weeks that followed, many Arabs died at the hands of the Spanish legionnaires.



Text & Photos by John Jameson



ERITREA'S FEMMES FATALES

PEERING through the gun slit of a fortified machine-gun bunker, Nebret Kubrom pointed out into no-man's land, where the sun-bleached bones of Ethiopian soldiers lay protruding through remnants of their green fatigues.

Nebret Kubrom, a smolderingly attractive 25 year old, was inspecting her sector of the Nacfa front, where she commands an infantry platoon of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) — 30 percent of whom are women. "I and my fighters are ready for them when they come again." Kubrom's face was hard and determined, showing the adamant resolve of the professional soldier. "But when they do attack, we will kill them again."

There is no discrimination between the sexes for particular roles. EPLF women warriors serve as front-line infantry and drive tanks; they also man artillery howitzers and are sappers tasked with clearing paths through enemy mine fields.

Front-Line Fighters in Africa's Forgotten War

Author John Jameson with EPLF forces in Eritrea.



HAVE CAMERA, WILL TRAVEL

John Jameson fought in Rhodesia during the last 18 months of that war. Afterward, he entered the British Army, graduated from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and served as a mechanized platoon commander in BAOR (British Army of the Rhine), Germany. Leaving the forces, Jameson continued a similar line of work, but in the capacity of a photojournalist on assignments in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, eastern and southern Africa as well as Northern Ireland.



ABOVE: Nebret Kubrom, 25, a female platoon commander, has been fighting for eight years, during which time she has been wounded four times.

RIGHT: Civilians wounded by air attacks undergo treatment at the EPLF's Orotto hospital. Orotto hospital is stretched out along a valley floor over a distance of some five miles, where nursing wards, laboratories and operating rooms are dug in below ground level, camouflaged against Ethiopian air strikes.



We were crouched in the forward fire trenches; only 50 meters away, beyond the barbed wire and antipersonnel mines, were those of the enemy — the Marxist army of Ethiopia's ruling Dergue (Committee) led by Colonel Mengistu. We had to move with caution, taking care not to expose ourselves to the apparently indolent, but nevertheless ever present, Ethiopian snipers.

Wounded four times, Kubrom's arm bore the scar of a vicious bayonet slash earned while leading her platoon in a counterattack against Ethiopian trenches. Her Kalashnikov still works, despite two holes through the receiver, testifying to the fierce nature of close-quarters combat, reminiscent of "going over the top" tactics from World War I.

This is Africa's forgotten war, and its longest. For almost 25 years Eritreans have been fighting against Ethiopian occupation of their Red Sea territory, which is approximately the same size as Mississippi.

The EPLF has been described as the paradigm of liberation fighters in Africa's long history of secessionist wars; their determination, tenacity and courage are legendary. They are the fighters, immortalized by Kipling, who broke the British square.

Now in control of the northern third of the country, they have dug, fortified and presently man a 400-kilometer trench front, deploying their forces in divisions, brigades and battalions. But perhaps the most extraordinary achievement for this volunteer army, estimated between 40,000 and 50,000 men and women, is that they are wholly reliant on armaments captured from Ethiopian forces.

They can mobilize some 150 tanks and armored vehicles as well as heavy and light artillery, rocket launchers and antiaircraft



Out of Africa's longest war comes the certain knowledge that Eritrea will find its freedom.

guns. The EPLF is now a larger and better equipped army than many African states, but that is where the equation ends. Their professional approach stands up well against, and in some cases surpasses, those of Western forces.

The regime in Addis Ababa is under considerable pressure. Faced with insurrection from six secessionist movements and a major war with Somalia, it has to allocate 40 percent of the Ethiopian budget to finance Africa's largest army of 300,000 men — whose strength, despite a series of forced conscriptions, is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. So seriously stretched is the Ethiopian army that Cuban troops have virtually taken over the fighting in the Ogaden region. But the EPLF is the Dergue's single largest threat, and more than 100,000 troops, equipped and led at battalion level by the Soviets, are now stationed in Eritrea.

"Operation Red Star" in the fall of 1985 was their eighth and most recent attempt at storming the EPLF's redoubtable defenses, and the grotesque mummified corpses in no-man's land told

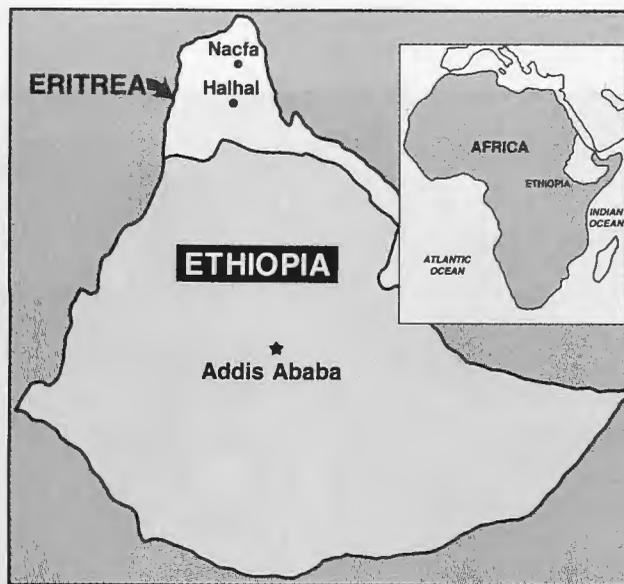
of their failure. Conscripting further troops for the long awaited and much heralded "ninth and final offensive" had proved to be a problem, a deep malaise having beset the military, giving the EPLF much-needed time to prepare. Meanwhile, Kubrom and her platoon maintained a vigilant watch.

"We know they are trying to build up their strength, but their lack of morale is their greatest problem. Their soldiers do not want to fight."

For Kubrom and her fiery amazons, war has been the only way of life they have known, the fear of constant attack something they have learned to live with, and the defense of their spartan positions second nature. Their trench system was part of number two company's position on a salient overlooking the enemy on Denden mountain in the 3rd Battalion's sector of the 61st Division's tactical area of responsibility.

Sentries continuously manned an old AC Spark Plug .50-caliber M2HB captured from the Ethiopians in the days when the United States supported the "Lion of Judah," Emperor Haile Selassie. Although battered, the weapon was nevertheless spotlessly maintained, its shells glistening with a light oil; waiting for the moment to rake the Ethiopian positions with fire.

Two sections maintained a presence in the forward positions. Lying on stone "beds" cramped in sleeping bays hewn out of the granite



For 25 years Eritreans have been resisting Ethiopian occupation of their Mississippi-sized territory. Nacfa and Halhal are sites of intense trench warfare between EPLF and Ethiopian army.

rock, each fighter had his or her own individual "fighting order" which hung from logs making up the overhead protection. Consisting of a canvas belt with magazines, stick-grenade pouches made from the leather of Ethiopian army boots, and small Soviet water canteens, it was

certainly frugal. "In defense, my fighters need no more than bullets and water," said Kubrom confidently, and with a little chuckle. "We have no plans of running away."

Nestled in almost every rocky niche of this defensive catacomb, grenades, RPG rockets and AK rounds were

menacing company for the rats, mice and scorpions sharing the trenches with these hardy fighters. There was no attempt at segregation in the narrow confines, and the women, though clad in drab, unflattering khaki, made no attempt to disguise their femininity. But the discipline was evident. "There is never any problem. We are all too preoccupied with being alert. The men respect my experience, as do my sisters." As well they should. Kubrom is a veteran of eight years' combat, the last three commanding her platoon.

In a rear-slope position, her third section was on admin duties, preparing a meager lunch of *njera*, a sour fermented bread that is singularly disgusting, and tea. Water had to be brought up from a stream an hour's struggle away. In the searing heat after lunch, safe in the knowledge of the Ethiopians' torpor, the platoon gathered together under the camouflage of acacia branches as Kubrom read aloud the EPLF's biweekly newsletter, which the platoon then discussed. I was disconcerted to find myself drawn in over an article on Mrs. Thatcher's Anglo-Irish accord and the role of British troops in Northern Ireland.

A more incongruous sight you could not imagine: heavily armed men and women seated along the sun-baked trenches, earnestly discussing the partition of Ireland and the strength of nationalist sentiment, while only 100 meters away were Ethiopian trenches. Concluding the seminar, Kubrom brought them to attention and dismissed them with a revolutionary cry of *Awet Nehafash* (Victory to the Masses), accompanied by a clenched-fist salute.

"My fighters have an unquenchable thirst for world news. We listen every day to Voice of America, the BBC,

FACTS & FIGURES ON ETHIOPIA

Official Name: Socialist Ethiopia.

Population: 31 million (1980).

Ethnic Groups: Oromo 40%, Amhara 25%, Tigre 12%, Sidhama 9%, other 14%.

Religions: Muslim 40-45%, Ethiopian Orthodox Christian 15-25%, animist 30-45%.

Languages: Amharic (official), Tigrinya, Orominga, Arabic, English.

Education: Years compulsory — none.

Literacy: 8%.

Life Expectancy: 38 years.

Work Force: Agriculture 86%, industry and commerce 10%, other 4%.

Geography: 472,000 square miles (about the size of Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico combined).

Capital: Addis Ababa.

Terrain: High plateau, mountains, dry lowland plains.

Climate: Temperate in the highlands; hot in the lowlands.

Per Capita Income: \$117.

Natural resources: Potash, salt, gold, copper, platinum.

Agriculture (52% of GNP): Coffee, cereals, pulses, oilseed, meat, hides, skins.

Industry (14% of GNP): textiles, processed foods, construction, cement, hydroelectric power.

Government: Provisional military government.

Constitution: None.

Political parties: None.

Suffrage: None.





as well as to the Voice of the Masses." The Voice of the Masses is the EPLF radio station, broadcasting in five languages throughout the Horn of Africa.

Their avid thirst for knowledge and culture is epitomized by the well-thumbed copies of literature dealing with social issues that are much in evidence around the trenches. Dickens is especially popular, along with Guy de Maupassant and Gorky, which are translated into Tigrinya and printed on EPLF presses.

That evening, dug in on a rear-slope position, four 82mm mortars were being prepared for action. Mecca Yassin, 24, who joined the EPLF five years ago, quickly adjusted the sights of a captured mortar, aligning it on the white aiming post. The mortar commander relayed the instructions to an observer positioned in a trench overlooking the Ethiopian front line.

"Two rounds, fire for effect," came that order over the radio. Yassin dropped two high-explosive rounds down the tube, then there was a clunk and a spurt of smoke as the two rounds discharged in rapid succession. A 30-second delay and the crump of the two explosions could be heard landing a kilometer away. Their positions were noted, and fire corrections relayed back. Yassin adjusted her sights and was handed a further two rounds by Hanna, her number two. The rounds were set for delayed detonation to penetrate Ethiopian overhead cover. Now that the baseplates were settled in from the first few rounds, all four mortars were set on the coordinates, and a 10-minute barrage commenced.

In the tedium of trench

Armed with a captured Kalashnikov, Nebret Kubrom is determined to help win Eritrea's independence — the hard way. Vicious bayonet scar on her left arm is souvenir of eight years of fighting.



EPLF's great success in mobilizing women is due to the near equality of sexes in EPLF forces; this is a striking difference from a society where women are treated, at best, as second-class citizens.

warfare such actions are as much to keep up the morale of the troops as to inflict casualties on the enemy and elicit a response. The retaliation came later that night, when Ethiopian artillery bombarded our positions with Katyusha rockets and shells. Without the benefit of observers correcting their aim, only superficial damage was inflicted. The main effect was to disturb the sleep of the fighters, who were safely ensconced in their well-fortified dugouts.

Farther west along the front at Halhal, a bone-rattling 10-hour night ride away, crews of an armored regiment sat under acacia trees studying English. Beside them lay their webbing and weapons, while laagered in camouflaged "hides" around them were their T-55s. Captured and

now used against their former owners, these tanks are part of the EPLF's Armored Brigade. "Our role at present is to provide artillery fire support for our infantry battalions dug in on the Halhal mountains," said Elias Sequar, a 41-year-old troop commander in command of five tanks.

He had led his troops in the battles for Barentu and Mersa Teclai, when the EPLF went on the offensive in 1984, combining their armored and infantry units in well-coordinated operations which led to the fall of these two important Ethiopian towns. "I was trained by the Americans on M113s when I was in the Ethiopian army," explained Sequar, "and have studied the blitzkrieg armored tactics of Heinz Guderian at officer's school.

"Our major problem is spares, which curtails our operational capability, and though we manufacture a number of items in our base workshops, we sometimes have to go out on foraging expeditions to take what we can from the enemy. But our field workshops are getting more proficient and can now change an engine pack within five hours."

His driver, an attractive 29-year-old woman, laughed at the suggestion that driving tanks did not seem like a woman's job. "I have been driving this tank for five years now and have seen a lot of fighting." Her eyes sparkled from beneath the leather helmet at the thought, and then she added with reflection, as though the fighting were a minor hindrance compared to the lack of crew comforts: "With the hatch on it does get hot and very noisy, but having this helmet and being small help."

EPLF's great success in mobilizing women has been due to the emphasis they put on the role of women in a society that has changed little since biblical times. In the EPLF there is no discrimination between the sexes for particular roles. Not only do these African amazons serve as front-line infantry and drive tanks, they also "man" artillery howitzers. Even EPLF engineer units, tasked with the hazardous duty of clearing paths through enemy mine fields, have women sappers.

The reasons they give for volunteering are varied, but without exception stem from a deep-rooted desire to liberate their country. "Even though I lived a relatively comfortable life as a refugee in Port Sudan, I was not able to live with my conscience while the

Dergue murdered my countrymen," said Sadia, a 20-year-old Muslim woman.

Ztege, 26, qualified as a computer programmer in Kenya but felt obliged to return. "In the field we are in our land and fighting for freedom. I am not frightened about killing — if your enemy attacks, you must kill him!" Having completed her basic training, she was to go into the line for six months before being assigned to computers in the Communications Battalion.

Setel, 15, one of three daughters of a Muslim refugee family, had another motive for volunteering. "My family had decided that I was to marry, but I wanted to fight for my country, so I ran away."

The training is tough and exacting. EPLF's women are

taught how to shoot to kill, using captured weapons such as American M14s, Soviet AK-47s and German G3s. They are also given a working knowledge of support weapons, including RPGs, recoilless rifles and mortars. But specialist training takes place on the front line when they are posted to their units, be it an infantry or anti-aircraft battalion, or an armored or artillery regiment.

Discipline is instilled by plenty of foot drill, with instructors using old British Army drill manuals to run recruits through their paces. Squads drilled up and down in the same fashion as on drill squares in armies the world over, mistakes were picked up and recruits yelled at with a ferocity that had them shaking — though sloping arms with Kalashnikovs is a little more difficult than with Lee Enfields.

Major Negash, formerly of the Ethiopian army, an original member of the Dergue and now senior instructor at the training camp, said of his female recruits: "After training, the women fighters run as fast, shoot as straight, throw grenades as far and are certainly as brave as any of the men."

It is during basic training, when still segregated, that the ideals of the EPLF are instilled in the recruits. Tribal traditions are excised and the continued practice of religious beliefs vehemently discouraged. The majority of recruits are Coptic Christian, but 40 percent are from the more deeply conservative Muslim population.

The tradition of female circumcision, where the woman's clitoris is removed and in some cases the vulva stitched up, is still practiced and causes many deaths every year; it is the women's major health hazard. Doctor Abreast Kidan, who heads the EPLF's

MYTH OF THE AMAZONS

This article inspired a discussion in the SOF offices about Amazon women. Most reference books claim that they are purely mythical, but a poll of SOF editors revealed a belief that there is some sort of historical foundation for the stories. Who hasn't heard the story about Amazon warriors who removed their left breast to improve their marksmanship with a bow and arrow? And anyway, it's such a good tale.

All we can say for sure is that the Amazons were a legendary nation of female warriors said to have lived in northeastern Asia Minor near the southern coast of the Black Sea, where they formed an independent kingdom (queendom?). They made a number of warlike excursions: to Scythia (southern Russia), Thrace (northern Greece), the coast of Asia Minor, the Aegean islands and even Arabia, Syria and Egypt.

No men were allowed to live in their country, but once a year, in order to prevent their race from dying out, they visited the Gargareans, a neighboring tribe, to replenish their population. Male offspring of these conjugal visits were either put to death or sent back to their fathers; females were kept and trained by their mothers in agricultural pursuits, hunting and the art of war.

Several famous Greek heroes crossed paths with the Amazons. One of Hercules' tasks was to obtain the girdle of the Amazonian queen, Hippolyte. Theseus carried off Hippolyte's sister, Antiope, and she died fighting at his side. Amazons appear in stories about Alexander the Great, and Pompey is said to have found them in the army of Mithridates.

The legendary female warriors may be just a figment of the Greek imagination, no more real than mermaids and sirens. But, on the other hand, the Eritrean warriors in this story may be the ancestors of one of those "mythical" excursions into Egypt and Arabia. Why not?



EPLF women undergo 82mm mortar training as well as instruction in other support-weapon areas. And they use this training against the Ethiopians in combat.

department of gynecology and obstetrics, has led a vigorous campaign to put an end to this practice, and claims that in areas under EPLF control incidences have been reduced by 75 percent.

Oroto hospital, where Dr. Kidan works, is stretched out along a valley floor over a distance of some five miles. It is a testimonial to the EPLF's engineering, military and medical skills. Nursing wards, laboratories and operating rooms are all dug in below ground level and are perfectly camouflaged against Ethiopian air strikes.

Twelve hundred patients can be comfortably cared for; 2,000 in times of emergency. Laboratory technicians work in former ship containers (making the perfect sterilized environment) in which 14 different medicines are manufactured. They also

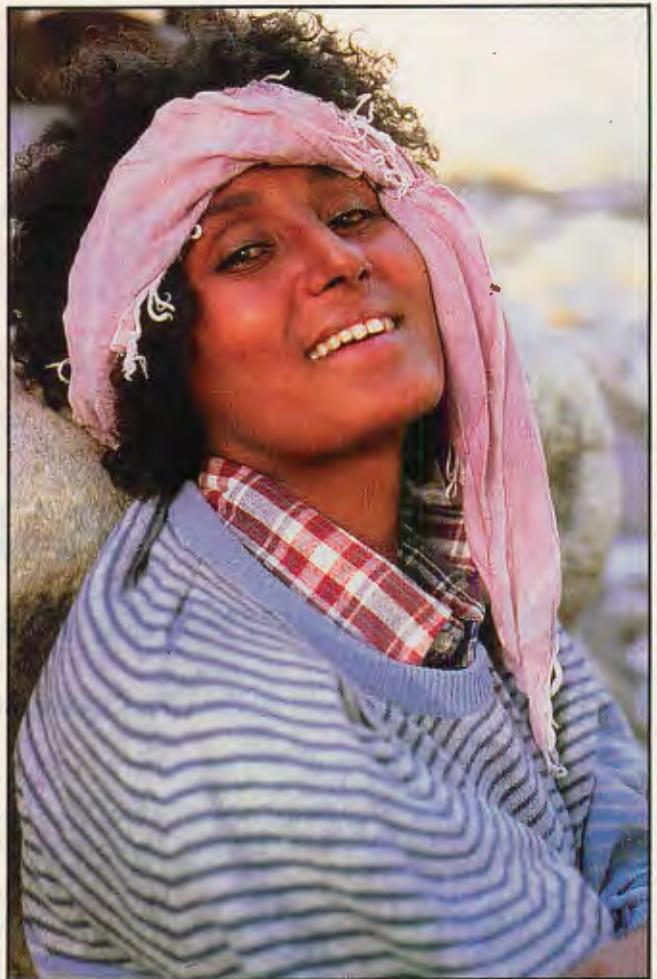
produce four different saline-drip solutions, including blood plasma, and the production of antibiotics is going to start soon. The fully equipped and sterilized operating rooms are capable of handling all types of injury, including intricate neurosurgery, ensuring the best of treatment for the wounded. The EPLF considers it psychologically important not to be reliant on outside help; it wants to be as self-sufficient as possible.

It is this absolute commitment, the degree of technical sophistication and their undoubted military ability that make any comparison of the EPLF with other African liberation movements inappropriate. A comparison with the Vietnamese would be more apt.

Without the luxury of operating from the sanctuary of another country, the EPLF has created a social and economic infrastructure within the area it directly controls, the northern third of Eritrea. Roads, schools and clinics have been built on a scale that any small country would be justly proud of — let alone a liberation movement engaged in a bitter war.

After a quarter-century of failing to subjugate the Eritreans, the Ethiopians are running out of men and resources. The pathetic demeanor of Demaro Welawo, 54, in his collection of tattered rags, told the sorry story of the 8,000 Ethiopian prisoners of war held by the EPLF. "When I was taken by the army, I didn't know and never wanted to know where Eritrea was," said Welawo, who has been in captivity for five years. "I didn't know then and still don't know why we are fighting the Eritreans."

Until the Ethiopians finally depart, Kubrom and her amazons will maintain their vigil in the Nacfa trenches. "I might live for five, 10, 15 years, or I might die tonight. Either way, I and my sisters will stay and fight." ✕



TOP: The reasons Eritrean women give for volunteering are varied, but without exception stem from a deep-rooted desire to liberate their country.

ABOVE: "After training, the women fighters run as fast, shoot as straight, throw grenades as far and are certainly as brave as any of the men."

SOF EXCLUSIVE

GUNS BEHIND THE GREAT WALL PART 5

China's General Purpose Machine Guns

Text & Photos by Peter G. Kokalis

Last year, at the exclusive invitation of the Chinese government, an SOFT&E team consisting of Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown, Technical Editor Peter G. Kokalis and contributing author Bob Jordan traveled to the People's Republic of China to examine and test-fire its military hardware. This eight-part series details the results of SOF's intel coup. So far our team has in-

vestigated the PRC assault rifle, squad automatic weapon, light and heavy machine guns, suppressed submachine guns and rocket launcher. Now, in part five, SOF puts the Chinese general purpose machine

Front to rear: PRC Type 67-2, Type 67-1 and Type 80 machine guns.

guns through their paces.

Once again SOF thanks the PRC government for inviting our staff to be the first Westerners to visit the People's Liberation Army Small Arms Research Institute outside Beijing. We also appreciate the efforts of the weapons designers and army officers who made themselves available to discuss the weapons with our team.



GENERAL Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG). What is it? It's difficult to define precisely. We owe the concept to the Germans and their employment of the MG 34 and MG 42 during World War II. General Purpose Machine Guns are supposed to be capable of serving as both medium machine guns and light squad automatics.

SOF Technical Editor Peter G. Kokalis fires Type 67-1 medium machine gun on heavy tripod mount.



Firing Type 67-2 General Purpose Machine Gun on light tripod.

Thus, they should be able to deliver sustained fire over fixed lines in support of advancing infantry and in perimeter defense and at the same time be light enough for carry by the assaulting troops themselves. They are invariably belt fed and feature quick-change barrels.

Like all things that are supposed to do everything, in practice the GPMG has never fully satisfied either requirement. While some are stable enough when mounted to a tripod, they are air-cooled and so frequent

barrel changes are required when they are fired for sustained periods of time. Ranging in weight from 22 to 24 pounds, they are too heavy, when combined with an adequate load of ammunition, for employment at the squad level.

Although the GPMG concept appears to be fading in popularity, machine guns like

TYPE 67-1/2 METHOD OF OPERATION

Gas operated and firing from the open-bolt position to reduce the possibility of a "cook-off," the method of operation has been taken from the Czech Zb26/30-British Bren series, the finest magazine-fed Light Machine Guns ever fielded and abandoned in large quantity by the Chinese Nationalist Forces when they fled the mainland.

When the bolt flies forward, a cartridge is pushed downward and into the chamber. After the bolt ceases moving, the piston/slide assembly continues forward and the bolt is tilted upward to butt against a locking shoulder in the top of the receiver. The piston/slide assembly continues its forward travel after locking is completed and the flat front surface of the hammer claw/piston post drives the firing pin into the primer.

Gas bleeding through the barrel vent passes into the gas cylinder to drive the piston rearward. After a short period of free travel to permit gas pressures to drop to a safe level, the ramp on the rear face of the hammer claw/piston post pulls the rear end of the bolt down and out of its locking recess. As the piston/slide assembly carries the bolt rearward, the empty case is extracted and thrown out the ejection port in the bottom of the receiver. The recoil spring is compressed on its guide rod. When the piston/slide assembly stops its rearward travel the recoil spring drives it forward in counter-recoil and, as long as the trig-

ger is pressed and ammunition remains in the belt, the process will be repeated.

The gas block and cylinder are pinned to the barrel. There is a three-position gas regulator attached to the gas block that has been taken directly from the RPD (PRC Type 56-1). The settings are marked "1," "2" and "3," any of which can be aligned with an index pin on the gas block. Number "1" is the normal setting. To adjust the regulator you must loosen and remove its retaining nut on the left side with the combination tool in the cleaning kit. Then press the regulator to the right to disengage it from the index pin. This can be a difficult procedure if the weapon is hot and/or the regulator is fouled.

The feed mechanism appears to be patterned after that of the belt-fed version of the Czech Vz52, which in turn had its origin with the Maxim/Vickers machine guns. All feed from the right, and this system is of proven reliability with a minimum of friction. Although the 7.62x54R cartridge is rimmed, a non-disintegrating belt, unique to the Type 67, has been designed for more efficient "push-through" operation. The links resemble those of the RPD, with a turned-down tab on the end of the link. When loaded correctly the tab must be behind the cartridge base. A drum-type belt carrier holding one 50-round belt can be attached to the receiver. Feeding is normally from an ammo can containing 250 linked rounds.

Operating by means of a lever system, the feed mechanism is driven by a cam

groove on the top front of the reciprocating slide. As the slide travels rearward, a roller on the lower feed arm enters the cam groove and is moved sideways by the cam. A vertical shaft then transmits this movement to an upper feed arm. A slot in the upper feed arm engages a roller on the feed slide, and the upper arm's movement causes the feed slide to move outward to engage a cartridge.

As the bolt and piston/slide assembly move forward in counter-recoil, the bolt strips a round from the belts and pushes it forward and down into the chamber. When the two feed arms move back to their original position, forcing the feed slide inward, the cartridge held by the feed slide moves into the feed tray's slot. A holding pawl on the feed tray stops the belt from falling out of the tray, and a pair of cartridge guides in the top cover push downward on the cartridge holding it for the bolt's forward run.

The trigger mechanism has been lifted off the RPD and is equally simple and robust. There is no provision for semi-automatic fire as the cyclic rate is but 650 rpm in both versions of the Type 67. A hook on the spring-loaded trigger enters an opening in the sear. When the trigger is pulled, the hook draws the sear downward out of engagement with the slide. Rotating the safety lever (located on the right side of the trigger housing) forward locks the sear in the upward position. Do not retract the slide group while the sear is locked or the two components will bind and render the weapon inoperative until it has been disassembled.

the FN MAG 58, M60 and MG1/3 will continue in service well into the 21st century. Originally equipped with duplicates of the Soviet DPM (PRC Type 53) and belt-fed RP-46 (PRC Type 58), in 1967 the People's Liberation Army adopted an indigenous de-

sign that cleverly mixes some of the very best features of no less than five earlier machine guns.

PRC Type 67-1/2 MGs

Is the Type 67 a true GPMG? Yes and no, because there are actually two machine guns

in this series, both chambered for the 7.62x54R cartridge: the Type 67-1 medium machine gun and the somewhat lighter Type 67-2, the GPMG version. Mounted on its tripod, the Type 67-1 weighs 55.2 pounds with the weight distributed as follows: 29.8 pounds for the tripod with 25.4 pounds for the weapon. Type 67-1 barrels weigh 9.5 pounds each. The Type 67-2 GPMG weighs 34.3 pounds, complete with tripod. Equipped with an 8.1-pound barrel fabricated from lightweight steel alloy, the gun's weight has been reduced to 22.1 pounds. A 12.2-pound tripod of the PKMS type is issued with the Type 67-2. Both weapons are 50 inches in overall length. Receiver bodies in each case are fabricated from substantial milled forgings. All the steel components, with the exception of the hard-chromed piston, have a black oxide or phosphate finish.

Type 67-1 and 67-2 barrels are approximately 24 inches in length with four grooves and a right-hand twist of one turn in 9 inches. Chambers and bores are chrome-plated and a conical flash suppressor is attached to the muzzle. Early Type 67 barrels were fluted in back of the gas cylinder. Barrels can be changed in less than 6 seconds in a manner reminiscent of the SGM Goryunov. Lift the top cover, press the barrel lock to the left, grab the carrying handle and pull the barrel forward out of the receiver. Insert the spare barrel, align the gas cylinder with the gas tube and press the barrel lock to the right. A screw on the barrel lock permits adjustment of the head-space (by qualified armorers only) in a manner identical to the SGM. This concept was also employed, somewhat differently, on the Japanese Type 99 LMG.

Fitted with a protective hood, the post-type front sight is adjustable for both elevation and windage zero. The open-notch leaf-type rear sight, attached to the receiver body, must be lifted to the vertical position for use. Rotation of the left knob adjusts elevation. Up to 1,000 meters, each click changes the point of impact by approximately 25 meters. At ranges beyond 1,000 meters, each click represents a change of about 20 meters. Each click of the right-hand windage knob will change the lateral point of impact about 1 inch for each 100 meters of range. An optional anti-aircraft ring sight can be attached to the left side of the receiver and the heavy tripod opened for this purpose.

Non-adjustable bipods were fitted to the gas tube on early versions of the Type 67. They are now mounted to a fitting under the front sight base on both the Type 67-1 and 67-2. The Type 67-1 is not normally equipped with a bipod, as it is most often employed on its heavy tripod.

Early buttstocks were plastic. They are now fabricated from wood. The steel buttplate has an RPD-type trap cover which retains a buttstock cleaning kit holding the standard assortment of tools and spare parts. The ochre-colored plastic two-piece pistol grip panels are retained by a single screw and nut.



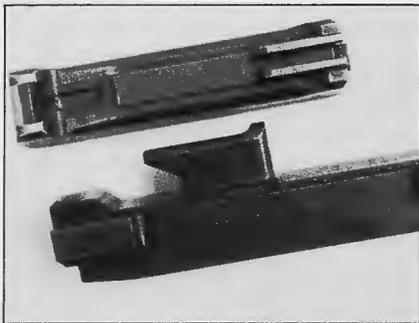
PRC Type 67-1, fieldstripped.

PRC TYPE 67-1/2 SPECIFICATIONS

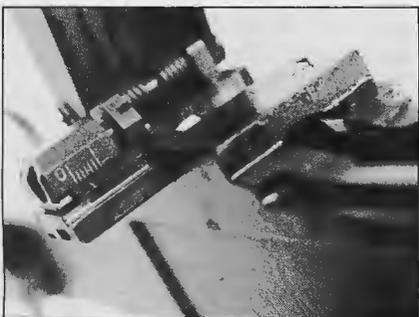
- Caliber:** 7.62x54R.
- Operation:** Gas operated with adjustable three-position regulator. Zb26/30-Bren type locking. Fire from the open-bolt position.
- Cyclic rate:** 650 rpm.
- Feed mechanism:** Belt fed. Non-disintegrating metallic belts with "push through" links.
- Weight, empty:** 67-1: 25.4 pounds; 67-2: 22.1 pounds.
- Weight, tripod:** 67-1: 29.8 pounds; 67-2: 12.2 pounds.
- Length, overall:** 50 inches.
- Barrel:** Four-groove with right-hand twist of one turn in 9 inches. Chrome-plated chamber and bore. Quick-change system based upon SG43 (Goryunov). Conical flash suppressor.
- Barrel length:** 24 inches.
- Barrel weight:** 67-1: 9.5 pounds; 67-2: 8.1 pounds.
- Sights:** Hooded, post-type front; adjustable for windage and elevation zero. Folding leaf-type rear with open square-notch; adjustable for elevation and windage. Optional anti-aircraft ring sight.
- Furniture:** Wood buttstock; plastic pistol grip panels.
- Finish:** Black oxide and phosphate; hard-chromed piston.
- Accessories:** Spare belts, spare barrels, cleaning kit, tripods, ammo chests and 50-round drum-type belt carrier.
- Status:** Currently in production; in service with the People's Liberation Army.
- Manufacturer:** PRC government arsenals.
- Exporter:** Poly Technologies, Inc., Dept. SOF, 5/F, Citic Building, 19, Jian Guo Men Wai Street, Beijing, People's Republic of China.
- T&E summary:** Sturdy and reliable in both configurations; 67-1 offers excellent accuracy potential and low group dispersion when fired from its heavy tripod. Sufficient energy to operate feed mechanism with any anticipated belt load. Clever adaptation of rimmed cartridge to "push through" belt. Heavy-barreled version is superior choice for battalion and company level issue.

Except for the gas regulators, all Type 67-1 and 67-2 components can be interchanged. Disassembly procedures are similar to those of the Bren. Lift the top cover and remove the belt. Rotate the safety lever rearward to the "fire" position. Lift the retracting handle from its vertical position upward 45 degrees to the cocking position. Clear the weapon and allow the bolt and piston/slide assembly to move forward into battery under control by holding the retracting handle. Remove the barrel in the manner described. Press the takedown pin at the end of the receiver out to the right and pull the buttstock and trigger group straight to the rear until separated from the receiver. Remove the recoil spring and guide rod. Pull the retracting handle to the rear until you can grasp the end of the slide. Withdraw the piston/slide assembly and bolt from the receiver. Separate the bolt and slide. Pull the retracting handle to the rear until it separates from the receiver. Remove

Close-up of Type 67-1 trigger housing. Note molded plastic grips and safety lever which has been rotated almost up into the "fire" position.



Close-up of Type 67-1 bolt and slide, which closely resemble those of the British Bren LMG.



Close-up of Type 67-1 barrel lock and headspace adjustment screw and gage.

the gas regulator in the manner already described and separate the bipod from the barrel. Drive out the feed tray's axis pin and lift it off the receiver. No further disassembly is required. Re-assemble in the reverse order. After placing the bolt

over its post on the slide make sure it's fully forward before attempting to insert this group into the receiver. Be careful not to kink the recoil spring when reassembling the buttstock and trigger group to the receiver.



PRC Type 80 GPMG mounted to its 10.4-pound aluminum tripod.

PRC TYPE 80 SPECIFICATIONS

- Caliber:** 7.62x54R.
- Operation:** Gas operated with adjustable three-position regulator. Kalashnikov-type rotary-bolt locking. Fire from the open-bolt position.
- Cyclic rate:** 650 rpm.
- Feed mechanism:** Belt fed. SG43 (Goryunov) non-disintegrating belts with "pull out" links.
- Weight, empty:** 17.5 pounds.
- Weight, tripod:** 10.4 pounds.
- Length, overall:** 47.7 inches.
- Barrel:** Four-groove with a right twist of one turn in 9 inches. Chrome-plated chamber and bore. Quick-change system based upon SG43 (Goryunov). M14-type flash suppressor with five longitudinal slots.
- Barrel length:** 27 inches.
- Sights:** Hooded, post-type front; adjustable for windage and elevation zero. Tangent-type rear with open square-notch; adjustable for windage and elevation. Elevation adjustments in 100-meter increments from 100 to 1,500 meters with 300-meter battle sight setting.
- Furniture:** Skeletonized wood buttstock; mahogany-stained with clear lacquer finish. Plastic pistol grip panels.
- Finish:** Black oxide and phosphate; hard-chromed piston.
- Accessories:** Spare belts, spare barrels, cleaning kit, ammo cans and lightweight aluminum tripod.
- Status:** Uncertain with PLA, apparently produced for export purposes only.
- Manufacturer:** PRC government arsenals.
- Exporter:** Poly Technologies, Inc., Dept. SOF, 5/F, Citic Building, 19, Jian Guo Men Wai Street, Beijing, People's Republic of China.
- T&E summary:** Battle-proven in over a quarter century of fighting. Extremely reliable in spite of complex feed mechanism required by use of "pull out" links. Lightweight and no buffer system, yet low perceived recoil. Imperceptible muzzle climb during short-burst sequences. Most likely the world's finest GPMG.

Both the Type 67-1 and 67-2 are exceptionally robust and reliable. There were no stoppages of any kind during SOF's test and evaluation. When fired from its heavy tripod, the Type 67-1 is capable of almost incredible accuracy, with an effective range of 1,000 meters. To maximize hit probability, both of these weapons should be fired from their tripods whenever possible and the bipods only when necessary. Save the hip-assault position for movie actors. Perceptions of felt recoil are of no consequence with machine guns in this weight category. There appears to be more than adequate energy to drive the feed mechanism with any anticipated belt load.

The Type 67 system was somewhat eclipsed in 1980 with the introduction of the PRC's duplication of what is quite possibly the finest GPMG ever fielded.

PRC Type 80 GPMG

First introduced to the Soviet army in 1961, the PK GPMG was eventually product-improved and lightened into the PKM (*Pulemet Kalashnikova Modernizirovanniy*) series. A quarter century of fighting from arid deserts to tropical jungles has demonstrated it to be flawless, with the possible exception of an overly complex feed mechanism required to accommodate an almost 100-year-old rimmed cartridge (7.62x54R).

PRC's Type 80 GPMG is a further improved and lightened version of this highly regarded machine gun. Chambered for a full-size rifle cartridge, the Type 80 weighs only 17.5 pounds, empty, due in no small measure to its pinned and riveted sheet-metal receiver and the extensive use of



sheet-metal stampings in other areas, especially the top cover and feed mechanism. This is 5.5 pounds less than the M60. Its excellent lightweight tripod (with aluminum legs) tips the scales at only 10.4 pounds. Overall length of this weapon is 47.7 inches. The four-groove, non-fluted

barrels have a right-hand twist with one turn in 9 inches, chrome-plated chambers and bores and are 27 inches in length. There is a flash suppressor of the M14 type with five longitudinal slots.

Barrels are changed in a manner similar to the Type 67 series and SG43 Goryunov.

TYPE 80 METHOD OF OPERATION

Gas operated and firing from the open-bolt position, the Type 80 has a rotary-locking bolt of the Kalashnikov type. With the weapon charged, pulling the trigger releases the sear and permits the compressed recoil spring to drive the piston/slide (bolt carrier) assembly forward. The bolt picks up the cartridge resting on the feed tray's lips and pushes it into the chamber. The extractor grabs the rim, and the bolt's forward movement ceases. As the piston/slide continues forward, its cam rotates the bolt 35 degrees to its locked position. Locked to the piston/slide assembly, the firing pin strikes the primer. After the bullet passes the barrel's gas vent, some of the gases are tapped off to strike against the piston face, driving it to the rear. After enough free travel to allow gas pressures to drop to a safe level, the bolt is rotated and unlocked from its recesses in the receiver. As the bolt and piston/slide assembly move rearward, the firing pin is retracted, the recoil spring compressed and the empty case extracted.

After striking the fixed ejector, the case is expelled out the ejection port on the left side of the receiver.

Meanwhile, up under the top cover, fresh cartridges are moving about in a reliable but rather complicated manner. To simplify matters, let's examine the belt's movement first. Feeding is from the right side. As the piston/slide assembly moves rearward in recoil, a cam along its side forces a roller on the belt feed lever outward. This causes the feed lever to pivot on its axis pin and the upper end, to which is attached the feed pawl, travels inward and the cartridge engaged by the pawl moves into position for pickup by the cartridge gripper mounted at the rear of the piston/slide assembly. When the piston/slide assembly moves forward in counter-recoil, a second cam strikes the feed lever, driving the feed pawl outward to grab another cartridge. Holding pawls in the top cover prevent the belt from slipping back.

When the piston/slide assembly is fully forward, two spring-loaded claws on the cartridge gripper slip over the rim of the cartridge. During the recoil stroke the cartridge is pulled out of the link. A

spring-loaded depressor, moving in conjunction with the feed cam, drives the cartridge down, out of the gripper's claws, onto the feed tray's lips. None of this latter motion would be necessary were it not for the rimmed cartridge and SG43 Goryunov "pull out" links.

The adjustable gas regulator has three positions marked "1," "2" and "3." To adjust the regulator, slip the rim of a 7.62x54R cartridge in the regulator jaws and, using it as a handle, rotate the regulator until the detent tab covers the number you wish to use. This sleeve-type regulator bleeds off excessive gas into the atmosphere and can affect the cyclic rate. When the weapon is clean and operated at the "1" setting, the cyclic rate is 650 rpm. If the "2" or "3" settings are used before serious fouling occurs, the cyclic rate can increase by as much as 150 rpm and decrease the life span of the reciprocating parts accordingly.

The RPD's simple and reliable trigger mechanism has been incorporated in toto except for a re-configuration of the safety lever.

7.62x54R AMMUNITION

The Russian 7.62x54R cartridge has outlived some glorious military contemporaries, such as the 8mm Lebel, .303 British and .30-06. Adopted in 1891 for the Mosin-Nagant bolt-action rifle, it's still going strong as a machine gun and sniping round. First bullets for this cartridge were flat-based, 150-grain projectiles called Type "L." In 1930 a boat-tailed 182-grain projectile with lead alloy core was introduced as the Type "D" (heavy ball — yellow tip). The current bullet, called the Type "LPS" (light ball — white tip) has a mild steel core and weighs 150 grains. This latter bullet leaves the muzzle at 2,700 fps. Performance of this cartridge is equivalent to the .30-06 round.

Except for commercial ammunition manufactured by Norma, the brass, copper or brass-washed steel or lacquered-

steel cases are Berdan primed. Bullets measure .311 inches in diameter. In addition to either heavy or light ball rounds, this caliber will be encountered with tracer, API, APIT and ranging incendiary projectiles. In the PRC this cartridge is referred to as the Type 53.

Since 1945, 7.62x54R ammunition has been manufactured by PRC, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Syria and Yugoslavia. In recent years, it has been difficult to locate in the United States except for occasional lots of Egyptian (captured by the Israelis) and Russian (1930s vintage) manufacture. Fresh lots of recent PRC manufacture are now available from Keng's Firearms Specialty, Inc. (Dept. SOF, Suite 222, 6030 Georgia Highway 85, Riverdale, GA 30274; phone 404-996-2079).

windage. Elevation graduations are in 100-meter increments from 100 to 1,500 ("1" to "15") meters. There is a 300-meter battle sight setting. A knurled knob on the right side corrects for wind deflection. Sheet-metal ears riveted to the top cover protect the sight blade.

A non-adjustable sheet-metal bipod is attached to the gas tube directly in back of the gas regulator. It can be folded to the rear or forward (when the weapon is mounted on the tripod). Its location on the weapon is excellent, as it permits the gunner to quickly engage flanking targets without seriously compromising accuracy potential. The tripod with its aluminum legs appears insubstantial, but is more than adequate for work at the squad level.

The most distinctive characteristic of any ground version of the PK machine gun is its skeletonized buttstock, which in 1967 also appeared on the Dragunov sniper rifle. Russian PK buttstocks are fabricated from wood laminate material, while the Type 80 stock is of solid wood construction, stained dark mahogany with a clear lacquer finish. There is a folding butt strap and butt trap compartment containing a cleaning kit that includes a bore brush, drift, broken case extractor and combo tool with a screwdriver on one end and gas cylinder reamer on the other. A three-piece cleaning rod and handle are attached to one of the tripod legs. Because the tripod is not always fielded at the squad level, this equipment is sometimes carried in a canvas pouch together with an oil bottle. The molded pistol grip panels are made of high-impact plastic.

Although disassembly procedures for the Type 80 approximate those of the Kalashnikov rifle, there are some important differences. Raise the top cover by depressing the Kalashnikov-type spring-loaded cover latch. Remove the belt, clear the weapon and send the piston/slide group forward under control. Raise the feed tray. Grasp the

recoil spring and guide rod. Push them forward and lift them out of the receiver. Grab the cartridge gripper and pull it to the rear until the slide is aligned with the notches on the receiver. Remove the piston/slide and bolt from the receiver. Pull the bolt forward and twist it free of the cam. Push the firing pin to the rear and extract it from the bolt body. Remove the barrel in the manner described. No further disassembly is required. Reassemble in the reverse order. The bolt must be in the forward position before seating the slide into the receiver. Pull the trigger and push the piston/slide group forward into battery.

This machine gun needs no further test and evaluation to demonstrate its already proven reliability. At 17.5 pounds and with no buffer system of any kind, the lack of perceived recoil is nothing short of amazing. If bursts are kept to three or four shots, the muzzle climb is negligible. The accuracy potential when fired from the tripod is more than adequate out to its effective range of approximately 800 meters. The handling characteristics are excellent, with a consequence of exceptionally high hit probability in the hands of experienced operators. This is truly an outstanding machine gun.

Type 67 machine guns are a mainstay of the People's Liberation Army. Some were given to North Vietnam, back in the good old days when these nations were on friendly terms. The status of the Type 80 GPMG in the PLA is uncertain, and it may be produced for export only. Its belt is incompatible with the Type 67 series but has been in service for some time with the Type 57 (SGM) machine gun.

As for me, I'll take as many Type 67-Is as I can lay my hands on for issue at battalion and company levels. Until it is chambered for a modern rimless cartridge of smaller caliber and its feed mechanism simplified, I take the Type 80 for my squad just as it is. ☒



SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown fires PRC Type 80 GPMG, an improved version of the famed Soviet PKM.

Lift the top cover, remove the belt and lift the feed tray. Push the barrel lock to the left as far as possible. Pull up on the carrying handle and then pull the barrel forward and away from the receiver. Insert the new barrel, push the barrel lock to the right, drop the feed tray, place a loaded belt on the feed tray, with the bolt group forward make certain the first round is in the cartridge gripper, close the top cover, retract the cocking handle. Commence firing.

The front sight base resembles that of the Kalashnikov, with protective ears on each side of the round post which is adjustable for both elevation and windage zero. A sliding, tangent-type rear sight with open square notch is adjustable for both elevation and

Wood buttstock of PRC Type 67-1 medium machine gun.



SANDINISTA FOOT-POPPERS

Piris Plant Deadly Crop Along the Coco

Text & Photos by Steve Salisbury

JULY 7th began like any other day for a young Nicaraguan refugee nicknamed Café Amargo ("Bitter Coffee" in English). The dark-skinned 28-year-old peasant with shaggy black hair and beard struggled through the underbrush along the Honduran bank of the Coco River to a field where he tended corn with other Nicaraguan peasants. They had all fled the communist Sandinista regime's savagery in their homeland, just 100 meters across the muddy waters of the Coco.

Last May they had to abandon this cornfield when Sandinista troops backed by Soviet-made Mi-24 Hind D helicopter gunships and heavy artillery launched an offensive along the Coco against the U.S.-supported insurgents of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, known by its Spanish initials, FDN [see "War Zone Bocay," SOF, September '87]. After weeks of ferocious fighting, FDN forces beat back the Sandinista onslaught and now the farmers were back at their field, feeling secure under the protection of hundreds of FDN troops.

However, the communists had left a vicious surprise for them: Sandinista sappers had sowed mines among the maize. An FDN commando stepped on one as Bitter Coffee and another peasant stood nearby. BOOM!

"The explosion threw us to the ground some meters away," recalled Bitter Coffee a couple of days later as he lay on a stretcher in an FDN clinic in the jungle. (Like many refugees, he did not want to use his real name for fear of Sandinista reprisals against friends and relatives in Nicaragua).

"It blew off the commando's foot and bathed Torrentino [the other peasant] and me with shrapnel," he continued and slowly rolled on his side to reveal the ugly burns and lesions on his right hand, arm and back. "We were screaming and the people came running fast to see what happened. A paramedic [of the FDN] injected us with a painkiller and we were carried to a boat for evacuation.

"The *piris* [pronounced peerees, a derogatory term the contras use for the Sandinistas which means "rabid dogs"] never leave us in peace," said Torrentino from the next bed. His buttocks were burned in the blast and much of the debris from the mine's

hard plastic casing that had ripped into his flesh could not yet be removed.

These *campesinos* and the commando were among the latest victims of a Soviet-made OTK-10 mine that the Sandinistas started planting a month ago along the Coco River and paths used not only by FDN troops but by civilians as well, according to FDN freedom fighters.

"This mine is designed to blow off the foot or leg of someone who steps on it and harm anyone within a 10-meter radius," said Don Toño last July. The graying 51-year-old chief of civilian affairs of the FDN's battalion-sized Nicarao Regional Command, which has some of its bases along the Coco, held a deactivated OTK-10 in his calloused hands.

The mine, about 6 inches in diameter and 4 or 5 inches thick, looks like a large hockey puck but has a clay-red hard plastic casing and its top is covered by a rubber gasket bearing numbers and Russian Cyrillic lettering. Two plugs protrude from opposite sides of the circular wall. One is shaped like a screwdriver edge and houses a double safety. The other is cylindrical and contains the primer. Don Toño unscrewed it to reveal a firing pin that is spring-ejected into the primer when enough pressure is applied to the release mechanism under the rubber gasket. The primer then blows one-half to three-quarters of a pound of an explosive similar to TNT.

The firing pin and spring as well as a steel thread holding the top and bottom halves of the mine together are the only metal parts in the OTK-10. However, it is still enough to

sound the alarms on the few mine-detectors supplied to the FDN by the United States. During my stay along the Coco River from 28 June to 23 July, FDN troops showed me over 100 OTK-10s that they had discovered and deactivated. The FDN rejects the idea of using the Sandinistas' own "foot-poppers" against them.

"There's no control of a pressure-detonated mine like these once they're planted," said Escorpión, the *nom de guerre* of an FDN mobile instructor. "They could maim civilians or your own comrades. But the communists don't care how many civilians they cripple. We use hand-detonated mines which we can control and avoid civilian casualties.

"Before, the Sandinistas were only planting Bouncing Bettys that would spring from the ground and explode waist high, many times killing the person who stepped on it and maybe those who were nearby. But there didn't seem to be nearly as many as the foot-poppers [the OTK-10s] that we see today."

One reason the FDN suggests that the Sandinistas are now showing a preference for the simple foot-poppers over the more devastating and complicated Bouncing Bettys is that they're probably cheaper. And the costs and manpower needed to take care of the wounded add a greater burden to FDN resources than if they were killed.

According to FDN doctors, about half of their 25 wounded comrades along the river from the last week of June to the third week of July were OTK-10 casualties. There have been so many civilians injured that the doctors could not give a figure of how many have fallen victim to the Sandinista foot-poppers.

Denied free speech, free assembly and free elections, thousands of Nicaraguans have voted with their feet and fled *Sandinismo*. Now the Sandinistas are intent on blowing off their feet.

"They only want to destroy us," said Bitter Coffee with a grimace from his hospital bed. "We flee from them because we don't want to be with them. They want to kill us. There is no liberty in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas don't even let us work outside Nicaragua — to the point where they plant mines in our fields." ☒

SOF'S CENTRAL AMERICA CORRESPONDENT

Steve Salisbury has traveled to all the corners of Central America during the years he has covered the region for SOF. His most recent articles include "El Quiche Patrol" (August '87) and "Contra Aid" (April '87). This story concerns Nicaraguan refugees trying to work and live peacefully along the Coco River in Honduras.



LEFT: FDN trooper displays Russian-made OTK-10 foot-popping mine planted by Sandinistas along Coco River.



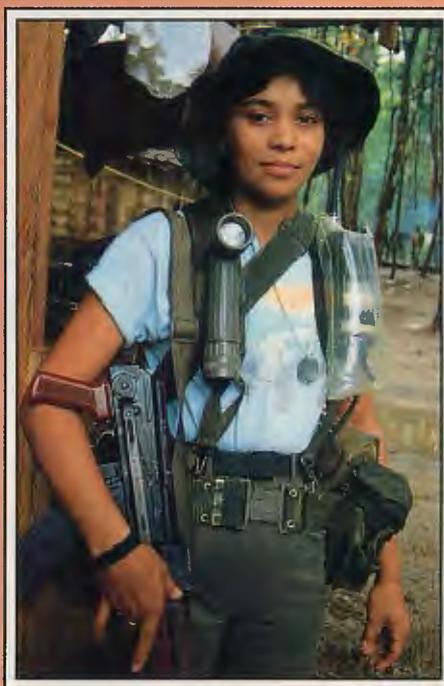
LEFT: Russian OTK-10 mine looks like a large hockey puck and is designed to blow off the foot or leg of someone who steps on it as well as disabling anyone within a 10-meter radius.



ABOVE: FDN troopers evacuate wounded victim of Sandinista foot-popper mine along the Coco River in late June 1987.



ABOVE: These refugees are only a few of thousands of Nicaraguans who have voted with their feet and fled *Sandinismo*. Sandinistas have planted mines in the fields of refugee peasants who are trying to create new lives in Honduras, across the Coco River from their homeland.



LEFT: FDN paramedic along the Coco River. Costs and manpower needed to care for the wounded add a greater burden to FDN resources than if victims were killed.

SALVO FTX

American-Led Training Op Turns Hot

by Harry Clafin

MOVING through the bush shortly after dark, the team members were taking things pretty lightly. Most of these kids had fought in the war for five or six years and this, after all, was a field training exercise (FTX) in an area that hadn't seen guerrilla activity for over a year. It's tough getting combat veterans to always be serious about "playing" war in exercises when they've spent much of their lives chasing a real enemy.

As we regrouped on the far side of a fence and counted noses, one hell of a firefight broke out about two miles to the west of us. As if on cue, compasses came out and azimuths were shot in that direction. I pulled out my map and plotted where I thought the fire was coming from — just two miles away there was a small military outpost in a village.

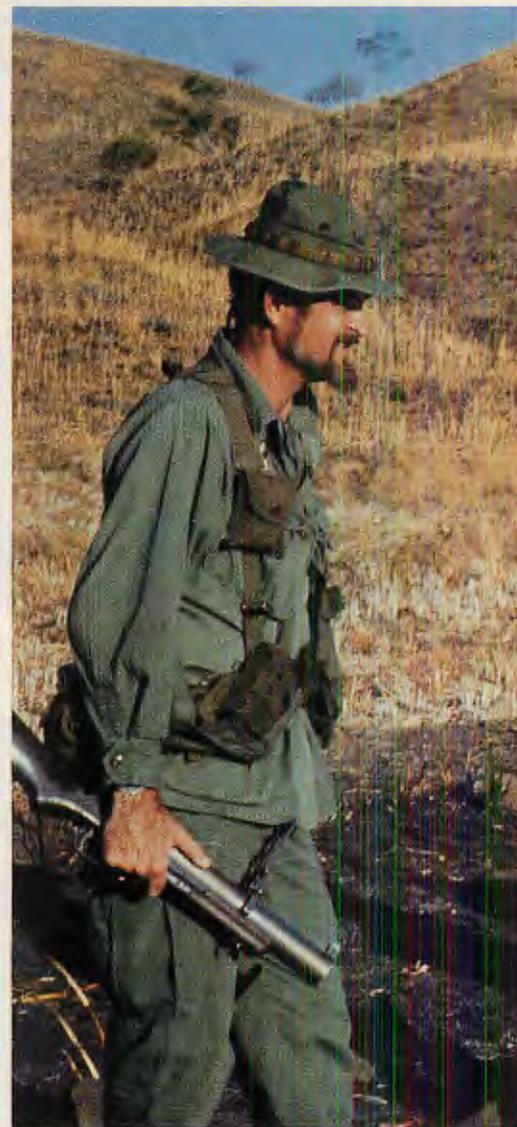
Our team's mood changed instantly as the war came close to home. If our position were discovered it wouldn't matter to the guerrillas that we were on an FTX. As we moved out in combat formation, quietness overtook us as the tension level mounted.

This exercise was the final phase of a six-week course designed to train infantry sergeants from the El Salvadoran Airborne Battalion to serve as forward air controllers (FACs). I had been assigned by the Salvadoran air force in 1986 to teach the course. At that time the Salvos had no one on the ground who could direct aircraft for air strikes.

Usually the task of FAC is delegated to pilots temporarily assigned to ground troops for combat operations. But the small size of the Salvo air force prevented this. In their place I planned on training NCOs from the Airborne

UNCONVENTIONAL SPECIALIST

Harry Clafin, a former reconnaissance Marine and Vietnam veteran, has written frequently for *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine, most often about his work as a military trainer in Central America. Aside from his work in El Salvador, Clafin also owns and operates the Starlight Training Center, a private military training facility in Liberal, Missouri.





ABOVE: Author (left) with M79 while teaching grenade launcher course in El Salvador. Photo: Steve Salisbury

LEFT: Author ropes in a trooper while instructing Salvadoran soldiers in helicopter rappelling techniques. Photo: Steve Salisbury

Battalion's recon platoon. Initially, given the taboos regarding social status in Latin culture, I thought this plan might present some problems, and so did the American advisers from the MILGP. This was the first time such a training strategy had been used and a lot of eyes were watching to see how it would turn out. Fortunately, all of the would-be FACs were tough, combat-seasoned troops and very highly respected.

The first five weeks were spent learning how to call air strikes with the help of pilots who flew all the different aircraft used in that area. At first the young sergeants were scared to death to talk to the pilots. After all, sergeants, unlike pilots, aren't officers and therefore aren't used to performing on an equal

level. But during the time the pilots worked on the ground with the men, a bond formed between the sergeants and the officers. That bond would mean a great deal when it came down to real combat.

With the officers involved in the training, they knew every kid by his voice and trusted his judgment. This type of rapport with the troops is taken for granted in the U.S. military, but in Central America all trust must be fostered through the kind of personal contact our training style encouraged.

In the sixth week it was decided we would go north of San Salvador about 12 miles to the foothills of Quacaphato. No guerrilla activity had been reported in this area for about a year. Our FTX was to last five days with everyone being picked up Friday morning at 0600 hours.

It wasn't until 2200 hours on Sunday that we finally got under way. My old friend the sergeant major had helped with the training and was with us as we headed out into the night. The landing zone (LZ) was a flat area just outside a small village. The objective of the

exercise was to infiltrate the area, set up an observation post (OP) and stay in the region for five days without being seen. Given the characteristics of the local terrain, this would be hard to do.

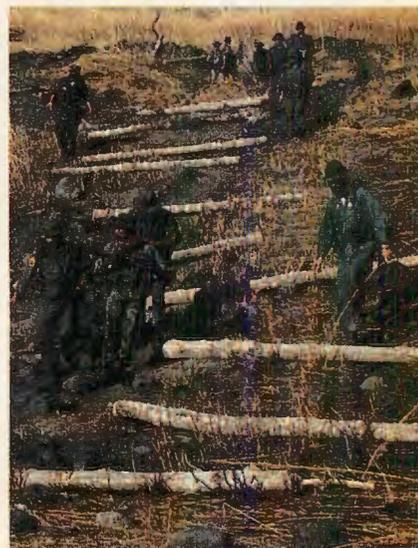
The insertion was no problem. From the LZ we had about 900 meters to travel to that night's objective. We had done our map study and aerial recon and thought we had everything down pat. But after landing we once again found that map studies and overflights can be deceiving — there were people everywhere, and what looked like small ravines on the map turned out to be small Grand Canyons filled with thorn trees.

We had picked a good night. It was pitch dark and raining like hell. Once on the ground we got our bearings and headed out. Now, I know everybody has had to cross fences sometime in their life, but in El Salvador they build fences like nowhere else in the world. They plant sticker trees for fence posts and string wires between them about two inches apart. After a few years you have a porcupine hedgerow with wire woven into it.

We took the first fence pretty quickly, all things considered. Then we hit the sugar-cane fields. If I never have to navigate through another cane field in my life it will be too soon. The Salvo sergeant warned me not to try this stunt, but I wouldn't listen. I told him you sometimes have to go through areas you don't want to in order to reach your objective. I was wrong and learned a lesson from the whole experience: If the locals tell you your way is shit and that they know of a better one, listen to them.

The cane field was about 300 yards across. Now you might ask, "How fucked up can you get in that short distance?" If you took a bucket of spaghetti and dumped it on the ground with half of it standing up and the rest folded down around what is standing,

Salvadoran soldiers on patrol. Photo: Steve Salisbury





that is what a cane field is like. Except the cane is 12 feet tall! In addition, sugar-cane leaves are like razors and will cut the hell out of you.

When we came out the other side, we had lost about 40 minutes and had gotten somewhat off course. After regrouping we started off again. By this time the locals were all off the roads and locked in their homes. If you ran into anybody after this he was likely to be a G. On the other side of the cane field we found another one of the fine fences and cut our way through it, being careful to tie everything back together before we left.

It was then that the firefight to the west broke out. Later we found out the Gs had hit this outpost. The local troops were able to hold out until daylight when reinforcements showed up.

After moving 50 yards we hit another fence. As each of us came up to the wire and crossed it, the trail took a hard left turn. The sergeant major was in front of me and did not see the man in front of him go to the left. I had just started to go over the wire when I heard a loud thump right in front of me. I hit the ground on the other side on all fours and crawled forward cautiously. After about three feet my left hand could feel nothing — the ground had disappeared. In front of me I could hear the sergeant major moaning in pain. He had missed the left turn and had fallen about 20 feet into a gully, landing in some heavy brush.

Here we were on the first day of the FTX and already someone was hurt. I pulled my 12-foot rope out of my pack as did the man next to me and we tied them together. We secured one end of the rope to a tree and I went down for a look. The sergeant major was not badly hurt. He had landed standing up and injured his right foot. It wasn't so bad that he couldn't continue, or so he told us. He was one tough old man. As the night wore on we had to cross about half a dozen more of these 20- to 30-foot deep gullies. The sides were straight down and covered with thick brush.

Salvadoran troopers deploying from U.S.-supplied Huey helicopter. Photo: Steve Salisbury



Salvadoran soldier armed with M16A1 takes cover in the bush during firefight. Photo: Steve Salisbury

Finally at about 0300 hours we thought we had reached our base camp. The terrain matched the map and the count was about right. We set in just as the rain reached its peak. We had a meeting with the sergeants who had just checked the perimeter. We were pretty beat up and dead tired. As the sun came up the rain stopped and we sent teams out to determine exactly where we were. As the teams reported back we found we were actually about 400 yards from where we thought we were. So much for our maps.

As the sun burned the mist away the sounds of the day drifted toward us. All around we could hear the sound of human activity: trees being cut, the sounds of kids, chickens, and people involved in their daily routine. In a tree line on the edge of a cane field we set up OPs and waited for dark.

Several people came within 50 yards of our position but did not see us. As night came we made contact with the base and about two hours after dark we moved out. It took us about an hour to reach our next base camp. A day later we started the FTX.

Teams were sent out in a 360-degree circle around the base camp. Every 24 hours they would change their positions. As the night wore on and the teams got into position we sat back in the base camp and went over what had happened up until now. The sergeant major's foot looked very bad and I asked him whether he wanted me to call a chopper to have him extracted in the morning. The look I got would have melted steel. He informed me to mind my own business and if I mentioned his age once more he would shove a grenade up my ass.

The standard operating procedure for the teams was to check in every hour on the hour using clicks on the radio. At about 2300 hours team three came up on the net and said they had spotted Gs on the road. They were watching them head toward a small village about three kilometers from them. This was not part of the FTX — these were real Gs.

We had the radio frequency of the civil defense unit in the village and tried to raise them. No luck. About an hour later we heard the Gs hit the village. The attack lasted about 30 minutes and then all was still. We were all stunned at what had happened. Team three came back on the air and said the Gs were coming back down the road smoking and joking.

Before the night was out all teams had reported that there were Gs in their areas. A quick count based on these reports had us sitting in the middle of about 75 bad guys. By 0300 we had decided to move the base camp to a more secure place.

We brought all the teams up on the net and informed them we were moving and for them to stay in place for 24 more hours. It took us about two hours to get to where we were going, about halfway up the side of a hill covered with thick brush. No more fun and games. This was for real.

As we moved out I was worried about the sergeant major being able to keep up; I could see he was really hurting. One of the Salvo soldiers stayed with him at all times.

The route we chose led through a banana plantation. Ever try to go through a banana plantation in the dark? This thing was on the side of a steep hill. By the time we got through it, it was almost daybreak. As we finally dragged ourselves into our new base camp, the sun was starting to come up.

I checked the perimeter with a Salvo sergeant. We got the radio set up and checked in with the teams. All was OK, but there had been Gs moving in the area all night. By this time over 150 sightings had been reported.

About 0800 I woke the sergeant major for a staff meeting. We had to make a decision as to whether to pull the teams back to the base camp that night and get the hell out of there or stay in place and gather as much information as we could on the G activity in the area.

We had 24 men in four six-man teams which were lightly armed and scattered over four square kilometers. How long could we stay in the area without being discovered? We had tried to raise the base at Ilopango all day with no luck. We had two days before we were to go back. Everybody was tucked in tight and the chances of us pulling it off were pretty good. We would stay.

This area was supposed to have been clear of G activity for the past year. Someone had screwed up. From our position we could see a man standing under a tree from where he could view the valley below. Every hour or so a small boy would come to report to him and then go away. Several times during the day aircraft flew over and he would duck under cover. This wasn't the kind of behavior you'd expect from a typical farmer.

The area we were in was very heavily populated. Several times during the day people came within 50 yards of our hiding place. None of our people ate, no one moved. With that many Gs in the area the locals had to be involved. As we settled in for our third night in the bush we still had not made contact with Ilopango. We were frustrated as all hell.

The sergeant major had rested well during the day and his foot was looking better. I had given him some Demerol and as long as he stayed off the foot he was fine. We did not know for sure if anything was broken. About an hour before dark we ate and cleaned weapons. The teams had all reported in and were in position.

We had brought an interceptor with us and were monitoring all comms in the area. This interceptor was basically a scanner receiver with a recorder. When we got back the tapes would be turned in and studied in detail. So far we had not picked up any G traffic. But at 2200 hours two things happened that got our attention. The teams started calling in reports of G movement on the roads, and there was a shot fired not 50 yards from our position.

At first I thought one of our guys had had an accidental discharge. I had just dozed off and it scared the shit out of me. We didn't know whether a G had walked into our position and one of the men had shot him or whether we had been spotted and a signal had been passed. No one moved for about five minutes. The Salvo sergeant crawled over to my position to talk to me. We could hear shots being fired from different directions all around us, each one coming from hilltops overlooking the valley we



One of the author's students for the forward air controllers (FACs) course in El Salvador. Photo: Harry Clafin

were in.

The sergeant and I moved to where our men were on that side of the perimeter. We found two very jumpy young soldiers who told us where the shot had come from. With the night-vision equipment I tried to see where the G who fired the shot was. No luck. There was too much brush. The sergeant and I eased forward about 25 yards and sure enough there he was, smoking a cigarette and taking a piss. We watched him for about 10 minutes and decided he did not know we were anywhere around.

When we came back into the perimeter we were very careful not to make a lot of noise. We did not want to get shot by our own men. I had told them not to shoot or throw grenades or do anything else while we were out unless all hell broke loose and they were being overrun. We left a set of night-vision goggles with

the two men so they could watch for us. No use taking chances.

Safely back inside our base camp we sat down to sort things out. We'd heard shots the two previous nights but didn't notice a pattern. We settled down to wait. Sure enough, at midnight our little friend let off a round, answered by shots on the hilltops around us. This went on all night, replaced at 0600 by the day watch with its children runners.

It didn't take a General Westmoreland to figure out we were sitting in the middle of a large G base camp of some kind. They were not using radios and were only moving at night. One thing was for sure — they were keeping a real low profile. All the teams had reported G movement in their areas until about 0200 hours.

The day passed with no surprises. We had decided to bring the teams in that night and move to our pickup point, which was about a kilometer away.

Continued on page 80

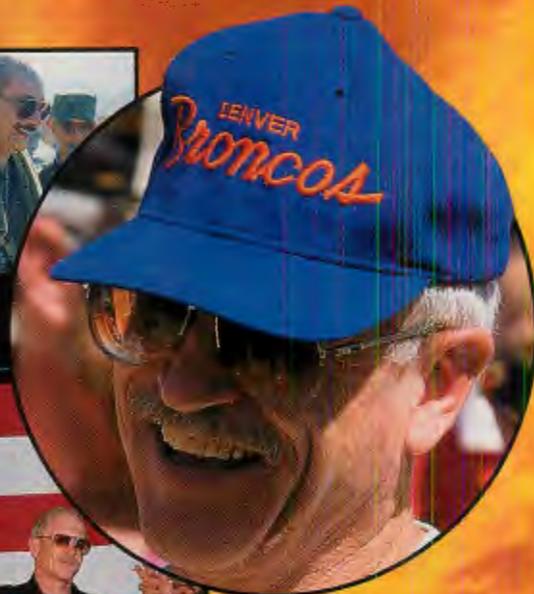
SOF CONVENTION

'87

by SOF Staff

THE 1988 SOF Convention and Expo will be held at the Sahara Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada, 14-18 September. Conventioneers can pre-register now by contacting SOF Convention, PO Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. Shooters can also pre-register by contacting Michael Horne, 408 E. Harding, Bakersfield, CA 93308. For further information, contact Convention Director Bill Brooks at (919) 392-2961. ✕

RIGHT: SOF Contributing Editor John Donovan and Technical Editor Peter G. Kokalis at the range.
Photo: Duane Hall



ABOVE: SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown. Photo: Duane Hall



ABOVE: Freedom fighters auction: Colonels McColl and Brown display captured Salvadoran rebel group FMLN flag. Photo: Duane Hall



LEFT: At the banquet: Robert K. Brown with Lewis Tambs, former U.S. ambassador to Colombia and Costa Rica; Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub; Mario Calero of the FDN; former Air America pilot Ed Dearborn and SOF Special Projects Director Col. Alexander M.S. McColl. Photo: Duane Hall



LEFT: Expo exhibitors offered everything from tiger stripes to military small arms. Photo: Duane Hall



ABOVE: Jump school included HALO instruction using tandem jump techniques.



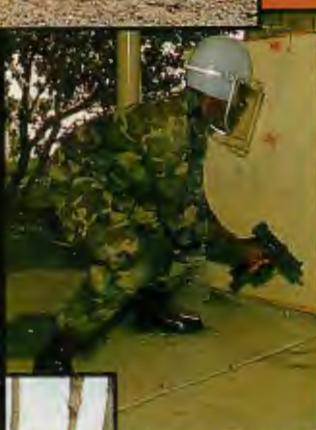
ABOVE: SOF Contributing Editor John Donovan. Photo: Duane Hall



RIGHT: General Electric GAU-2B/A 7.62x51mm NATO minigun. Photo: R.P. Montoya



LEFT: Paint-gun wars once again left the Sahara Hotel splattered with paint. Photo: Duane Hall



FAR LEFT: Nightly entertainment, SOF-style. Photo: Duane Hall



RIGHT: Marching on the Colors at the banquet. Photo: Duane Hall

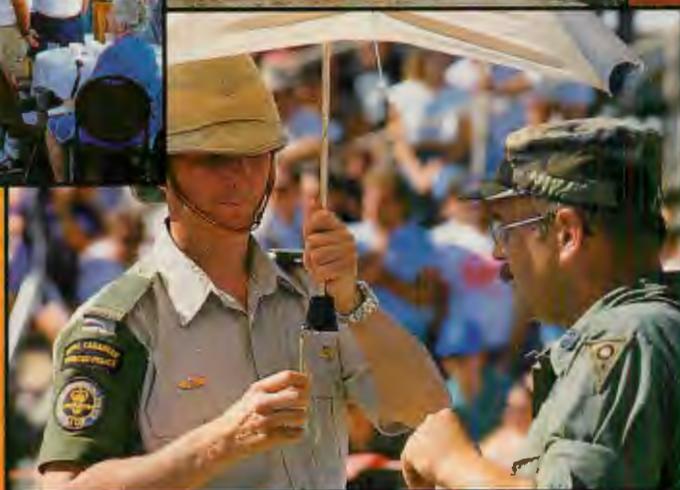


BELOW: On the firing line. Photo: Duane Hall



RIGHT: Ron Kurelo's wardrobe added a touch of class to the convention. Photo: Duane Hall

LEFT: Bo of the Survival Store autographing posters at the Expo. Photo: R.P. Montoya



SHOT OUT OF LAOS

SOG Runs Into Heavy Traffic on Uncle Ho's Highway

by Isaac Staats

Photos by Ron Zeiss

Target: E-8.

Command and Control: MACV-SOG, 5th SFGA.

Area of Operation: Laos.

Codename: Prairie Fire.

Mission: Primary — Capture NVA soldier. Secondary — Wiretap NVA communications lines.

Alternate — Look for American POW.

Target Team: Spike Team (ST) Idaho.

Date: 8 November 1968.

Launch Site: Phu Bai, FOB #1.

Insertion Aircraft: Kingbees, Vietnamese-piloted H-34 helicopters.

Lead Ship: 10 — U.S. team leader, Staats; 11 — U.S. assistant leader, John Shore; 01 — Vietnamese team leader, Sau; and 02 — team interpreter, Hiep.

Second Ship: 12 — third American, Henry King; 03 — Point man, Son; 08 — tailgunner, Cau; and 09 — M79 man Tuan.

Third Ship: Backup.

Assets on Site: 2 A1E Skyraiders, 1 O-2 Covey, 2 UH-1B Huey gunships, and F-4 Phantoms on call.

Operation Command Center: MACV-SOG, Phu Bai, FOB #1.

OUR patrol order was simple and straightforward, but it was a long way from the whole story. By early November 1968, Spike teams in Forward Operating Base (FOB) #1 had taken a beating. Teams from MACV-SOG running missions into Laos found it harder to penetrate the Prairie Fire area of operations (AO).

Enemy trackers were getting better and Charlie kept installing more 37mm anti-aircraft guns, which were extremely effective against choppers. In addition, the NVA began putting spotters on LZs. Because the number of good LZs was limited, they'd booby-trap some of them. Intelligence reports had warned all teams about the deadly

helicopter booby traps regular Army troops had encountered on LZs in Vietnam. These booby traps, initiated by thin tripwires, triggered firing devices that included everything from hand grenades to 250-pound bombs hidden on the LZ.

Nonetheless, the brass in Saigon and the S-3 (operations) boys at FOB #1 never re-lented in trying to get a team on the ground in the Prairie Fire AO. The reasons were simple: Intelligence reports said the NVA had more than 40,000 people maintaining the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex in Laos and Uncle Ho's troops were sending an ever-increasing number of troops, along with supplies and weapons, down the network of hidden trails.

Because of the endless escalation of NVA activity in Laos, Saigon had an equally endless appetite to get as much intelligence from the AO as possible. For several days before ST Idaho drew the Echo 8 target, our team had set a record of sorts by getting shot out of more LZs than any team in Phu Bai.

Setting that record — no one actually counted the numbers — was a draining, often deadly exercise which would run like this: As the team leader, I'd get a target in the morning, the covey (O-1 observation aircraft pilot), if he had time, would pick primary, secondary and alternate LZs. We'd load up on the Kingbees (H-34 helicopters), go into the primary LZ and get shot out, then get shot out of the secondary and alternate sites. Because the flights to the Prairie Fire AO were so long, we'd have to fly back to Phu Bai, refuel, eat lunch, get another target and try it again — with identical results in the afternoon.

After four days of being run out of LZs, ST Idaho was beat. The fatigue of being airborne for so long and then flying into an LZ and either getting shot out of it or spotting enemy personnel, which compromised the mission, was exhausting.

On the fourth day, we got blown out of the three LZs in the morning. While the team ate lunch, the S-3 told me the afternoon target would be Echo 8. Shortly after receiving the assignment, I found the man flying covey for us, SFC Robert "Spider" Parks, and told him the news.

At the time, Spider was joking with a couple of guys in the club. When I said Echo 8, the smile drained from his face and he warned: "Don't forget what happened to Lane. Be extra careful out there. Charlie has his fucking act together there, and we still don't know what happened to Lane."

Lane was Sergeant First Class Glenn Lane. In May 1968, Lane was the leader of ST Idaho when it was inserted into Whiskey 2, a target a few clicks away from Echo 8. After Lane's team was inserted, the radio-man gave a team OK. That was the last anyone ever heard from them. For two or three days, numerous coveys tried to raise Lane or anyone from his team. The way it looked, ST Idaho simply disappeared.

When ST Oregon ran a "Brightlight" mission (a heavily armed recon team that carried no food and little water as it searched

TWO-TOUR VETERAN

Isaac Staats served two tours with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in Vietnam. His first tour of duty was at FOB #1 in Phu Bai and SOG's CCN in Da Nang, the second at CCN in Da Nang. Staats now lives and writes in San Diego. His other articles in SOF include "Border Legend," July '87; "Interview: Harold W. Ezell," September '87; and "Never on Sunday," December '87.



for a missing team or team members), the team couldn't get off of the LZ. They were hit hard by NVA troops firing American weapons and using American hand grenades instead of the less reliable Chicom grenades. Every team member of ST Oregon was wounded.

No one ever heard from Lane or his ST Idaho again. Two weeks after Lane disappeared, Spider was appointed 10 for Idaho and I became the 12 — radio operator. By November, Spider was flying covey and I was the 10, an E-3 filling an E-8/E-9 slot,

Into Laos. H-34s with SOG spike teams embarked fly into the Prairie Fire area of Laos.

HO CHI MINH'S TRAIL

One of the oldest concepts of warfare is the maintaining of a secure rear base and an equally secure line of communication to the front. Vietnam was certainly America's most unconventional war, but even in the jungles of Southeast Asia this basic principle of warfare remained valid. And while a secure rear base and secure lines of communication to the front presented little problem for the United States, the other side of the coin, denying those things to the enemy, was a never-ending challenge. Despite some of the United States' most expensive and wide-ranging efforts mounted during the war, the Ho Chi Minh Trail system never failed to supply men and materiel for the communists' war in the south.

After the American withdrawal in 1973, the trip down the Ho Chi Minh Trail was made in three to four days. But that had not always been the case. Earlier in the war, groups of 100 to 300 men made the trek in two to three months, starting inside North Vietnam near the Laotian border and ending near Tchepone in southern Laos. The troops marched for 13 hours a day, resting 10 minutes each hour. They were led along each section of the Trail by an agent responsible only for that area. After arrival in Tchepone the units were led into South Vietnam and linked with units already operating there.

The Trail grew from rough jungle trails to a well-maintained system serviced by way stations with resupply points, medical facilities and rest areas. In places an all-weather road was constructed as well as an oil pipeline and telephone lines. As the Trail improved, ever-increasing numbers of men went south. Between 1965 and 1967 it's estimated that an average of 7,000 men a month moved down the Trail. For the year 1968 the number is believed close to 100,000. At war's end the "trail" had become more of a highway.

The Trail existed almost entirely in-

side Laos. That the North Vietnamese were able to take advantage of "neutral" Laos was not so much a result of their being able to militarily deny the area to U.S. forces as it was a result of political restraints that had their origin in the Kennedy administration. In 1961, contrary to the Geneva Accords, the North Vietnamese were using trails in Laos to supply forces in the south. Kennedy threatened intervention, which brought the North back to the negotiating table. Averill Harriman, chief negotiator for the United States, reached an agreement whereby Laos would be free of any foreign troops. While the North Vietnamese merely defied the ban, American activities were monitored by Senator William Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which attempted to ensure American compliance with the treaty. As the NVA presence in Laos grew throughout the war, political considerations continued to limit American response to the buildup, frustrating the efforts of the American military.

But while U.S. efforts on the ground were severely limited, other options, including bombing and electronic surveillance, were exercised. Bombing tonnage (2,235,918 tons) exceeded the total dropped by the United States in World War II. Ingenious surveillance and monitoring measures of the Defense Communications Planning Group (DCPG), among others, resulted in the first ever "electronic battlefield," providing real-time intelligence about movements on the Trail. But in General Westmoreland's opinion, "The only completely effective method of interdicting enemy movement through Laos is to *deploy forces* into Laos."

During the course of the war three things were to prevent Westmoreland from having his way. Foremost was domestic political considerations. Congressional opposition to violating the Geneva Accords, fear of greater protests against the war, and the effects that the projected high casualties would have on

American public opinion all contributed to limiting involvement in Laos.

A second factor limiting American activities, and which affected other decisions about the war as well, was the fear of Chinese intervention. Chinese intentions remained a mystery to American planners throughout the conflict, successive administrations always believing there was a line which, when crossed, would result in direct Chinese intervention. While that fear was probably ungrounded, it nonetheless affected American planning.

As close as Westmoreland would come to winning approval for a large-scale Laotian intervention came in 1968. His proposed operation, codenamed El Paso, was initially rejected. After being reworked to address some of the concerns of his superiors, mostly those of the CINCPAC, Admiral Sharp, the plan was resubmitted. Within 24 hours of sending his revised plan to Sharp, the NVA and VC launched the Tet Offensive, bringing planning for El Paso to an immediate halt.

It is clear that not closing the Ho Chi Minh Trail system contributed to the American failure in Vietnam. Why some of the grand efforts such as the bombing and the DCPG had little effect in the end is less clear. Certainly thousands of enemy troops were killed and many supply columns destroyed. Lane Rogers, an experienced Marine, wrote in 1966 that, although the method being used by the NVA "requires more time and personnel than Western organizations, it is not dependent on any specific or vulnerable routes . . . even if five columns are interdicted, others are re-routed and the ant-like procession continues." There also may be some truth in Westmoreland's explanation of why American efforts against the Trail failed: "The Trail veterans were a tough, persevering bunch and perhaps the terrors . . . were nothing compared to those of nature on the Trail itself."

— G.B. Crouse

which was not uncommon in 1968.

With Spider's warning ringing in my ears, I briefed the team. Sau's eyes lit up when I showed him the map and our latest target. "Number fucking 10 target!" he exclaimed. He had been present at Lane's final briefing, but didn't run that fatal mission. After we ate lunch, we boarded the Kingbees and headed west again. Lane and the other missing members of ST Idaho, who remain missing today, haunted us.

Enroute to the target, Spider radioed me that he had found a good LZ on the side of a mountain. Even as the 10, I carried the radio on ST Idaho. There were too many cases of young radiomen accidentally misdirecting airstrikes onto their teams.

I sat in the door when we neared the target area and Shore crouched behind me. When the Kingbee pilot spotted the LZ, the old H-34 suddenly went into a dying, diving swan act as he spiraled downward several thousand feet toward the LZ.

About 100 feet from the ground, the pilot revved the engine, ending the dead swan spiral, and flared out for a landing. As we descended, I searched the LZ for booby traps and Shore scanned the woodline. For the first time in four days, there was no greeting party or booby traps.

The insertion was slick. From the LZ, we found a narrow pass into the jungle which led to an enormous wooded area that looked more like the White Mountains of New

Hampshire than a Southeast Asia jungle.

Because the wooded area was so open, I put the team on line and Sau reminded everyone to cover their own tracks as we advanced north up the mountain. Instead of moving cautiously as we normally did in dense jungle, I had the team march as quickly as possible. As we moved up the mountain, I radioed Spider with a "team OK."

Usually, after receiving a team OK, Spider would silently fly out of the target area. On that day, he warned: "Be careful. . . . I'm going to fly over another team [which had launched from Mai Loc] and I'll be back in an hour. I'll stay over target until I hear a click team OK from you."

A click team OK was merely breaking

Vietnamese-piloted H-34, assigned to SOG, flying over Laos.



LANTERNS IN LAOS

The crachin — a cold, damp fog that covered the Annamite Mountains along the Laos-Vietnam border — turned our three-day patrol in the hills northwest of Khe Sanh more miserable than usual in March 1967.

It had been a fairly typical patrol. There was little sign of the NVA and there had been no contact. We'd humped all day through rugged terrain and thick brush with packs so heavy our shoulders were rubbed raw.

Normally one didn't look forward to the sun going down in Vietnam, but under the circumstances we did. Rest at last.

That lasted until somewhere around midnight, when I looked out to the west through a hole in the fog and saw an

entire damn mountain light up. The whole platoon was up real quick and staring out incredulously at the sight of what appeared to be hundreds of NVA moving around with lanterns on a slope way off to the west toward Laos. Our platoon commander and platoon sergeant got busy under a blanket with a map and flashlight trying to figure out just which one of the scores of ridge lines out to the west to try to get some arty called in on, while the rest of us just watched in utter amazement.

We couldn't come up with any reasonable explanation for why the NVA would light up what had to be a major concentration of their forces. The arty never arrived — I don't think I ever learned why — and after an hour or so the lanterns were extinguished.

We wrote it off to the "dinks" just

trying to mess with our minds and forgot about it. Over the years I've told the story numerous times when the talk drifted around to the weird things one saw at night in Vietnam.

Then reading Issac Staats' "Shot Out of Laos" some 20 years later I came across the section describing the NVA lighting up lanterns to search the mountain for the SOG patrol, and I realized what I had seen that night.

Back then I knew there were some Army guys doing weird things but never had any idea they were running around over in Laos.

Now I know that it was not a little NVA psy-war but a desperate game of hide and seek in the hills. I hope those SOG guys made it.

— Jim Graves



Vietnamese pilot on the struts of his H-34. Door gun is Browning M1919A6 .30 caliber.

squelch twice quickly on the PRC-25 handset. Without speaking, we minimized the NVA's radio direction finding (RDF) capabilities.

I wanted to get as far away from the LZ as quickly as possible. For more than an hour we pushed up the hill, moving on line for at least 30 minutes before returning to more traditional in-line march. Because we moved without taking a break, climbing straight up, the team was sucking gas. We were still a long way from the top of the mountain, which was where I hoped to establish our rest over night (RON) site.

After about 75 minutes on the ground, Son, who was running point, and Sau, who was behind him, signaled "trail ahead." Son and Sau moved forward for point reconnaissance while the rest of us caught our breath.

Sau returned in a few minutes. He said there was good news and bad news. The good news was there were NVA walking casually along the east-west trail. Some of them had AK-47s on their shoulders without magazines in them. Speaking through Hiep, our interpreter, Sau said, "I don't think they know we're here."

The bad news was the trail was wide, as wide as two lanes on an interstate.

On the north side of the trail were telephone lines. I told Sau I wanted to get across ASAP. Shore moved east and I moved west along the trail to provide security while the team crossed.

We crossed without incident and I moved the team about 100 yards north of the trail. Sau climbed one of the telephone poles and started a wiretap on the phone lines. Meanwhile, Shore, Son and Tuan moved down the mountain and put in our ambush explosives.

Again, the wooded area worked to our advantage; it wasn't the thick sort of jungle where you couldn't see 10 feet in front of you. Team members could move quickly, yet had enough cover to avoid being seen from the road.

The ambush munitions consisted of two claymore mines facing the trail, with the inner killing arcs crossing in the center of the ambush. Hours of practice installing an ambush paid off here. They knew exactly how far apart the claymores had to be. At

the center of the claymores' killing zone, between the arcs of pellets they'd throw out, there was a zone big enough for one person to survive. And exactly six feet from the trail, at that precise location, was a piece of C-4 plastic explosive which was powerful enough to knock unconscious the one person who survived the deadly claymore killing zone.

We knew the C-4 was the right amount because one of our fellow Green Berets practiced igniting different quantities of C-4 until he knocked himself out on our firing range at Phu Bai.

SOG spike team pauses underneath NVA version of Bell Telephone in Laos.



Then Son and Tuan placed flank security claymores at the eastern and western ends of the ambush zone for team security, and Cau put a claymore north of our team for rear security.

Textbook perfect. With the ambush set up, Shore and I started joking about where we'd spend our bonus and extra R&R. MACV-SOG had promised that all team members who captured a live NVA soldier would get a cash bonus and a five-day R&R anywhere in the world.

We had good reason to dream. 'Sau and Hiep, who spoke French, English, Vietnamese and understood some Laotian, were monitoring the wiretap. As we sat on the north side of the trail, we observed several more NVA soldiers, including an officer, walking casually without realizing we were contemplating snatching their bodies for a quick trip to Saigon.

When Spider returned, I could barely control my enthusiasm. I told him to scramble the Kingbees and give me a precise time on target (TOT) at our primary LZ because we'd have one live NVA package. Because it was an open air transmission, the NVA POW portion of the message was in code, just in case Charlie was monitoring our frequencies.

Then things turned to shit.

"Don't move!" Spider cautioned. "Don't move! Don't breathe! Don't fart! Don't do nothing," he said in an unusually nervous voice.

Before I could ask why, he continued, "I'm at 10,000 feet and I can't see you. You're simply socked in. Right now we couldn't find a mountain down there, let alone a spike team. Cool it. Don't do anything. And above all, don't make contact until this weather breaks."

Then I remembered seeing a bank of clouds to the west as we inserted. As I looked up, the jungle/forest we were in was over 200 feet tall and blocked out direct sunlight so we couldn't tell what the sky looked like.

We heard tanks moving north of our position and dogs from the direction of our LZ. All of a sudden, people on the trail started running. No more casual Sunday walks without weapons. A squad of NVA walked past, moving west. Then I thought about Lane. Spider's last warning, "Don't move. Don't do anything," was ringing in my ears.

Within minutes, we heard the first shots fired by scouts who were working with the dogs. It was obvious the damn dogs were heading north and had found our scent.

I ordered the ambush disarmed and repacked. I told Sau to run the wiretap as long as possible. He had it rigged so he could pull it down with a quick jerk on the wire.

The tanks that were north of us sounded like they were heading west, so we moved east. Before we left, Cau placed large quantities of ground black pepper in the area where we had set up our ambush, to foul the noses of the dogs.

We continued to move east around an enormous mountain as the activity con-

tinued to escalate behind us. At approximately 1800 hours we encountered a mountain creek that ran south down the hill, that had lots of water in it and steep embankments on each side.

We jumped in the creek and moved north, upstream, for 15 minutes without pause. Because of the heavy cloud cover, darkness was beginning to set in. Sau, who had been running missions for five years, agreed that it was best to move as long as we could.

Occasionally the team would stop and all eight members walked up the embankments and into the jungle, setting false trails for the dogs to follow.

By last light the team was exhausted, hungry and wet. Spider said the weather had worsened.

As we moved up the east embankment, we could hear dozens of trucks south of us, apparently moving along the trail where we had set up our ambush hours earlier.

Sau climbed the biggest tree around to see what was going on. He said the trucks were bringing hundreds of NVA troops along the road where we had set up our ambush. And they were heading north up the mountain with lanterns, looking for us.

We ate our dehydrated rations in shifts. At midnight, the NVA and their dogs were still coming up the mountain. At 0130 hours, Sau said he could see the lanterns approaching our team.

Around 0300 hours, the lanterns got low on fuel and most of the NVA finally turned around and went back down the mountain, except for two soldiers who had walked up the creek and past us. After they walked past us I gave Hiep, who had a bad cigarette cough, a bottle of cough syrup to suppress any coughs because the damp weather, wet ground and walking in the creek had irritated his throat.

As the two NVA were returning down the mountain past us, walking in complete darkness, Hiep coughed. Then one of the NVA started crawling up the embankment toward me. I was facing the creek, sitting up.

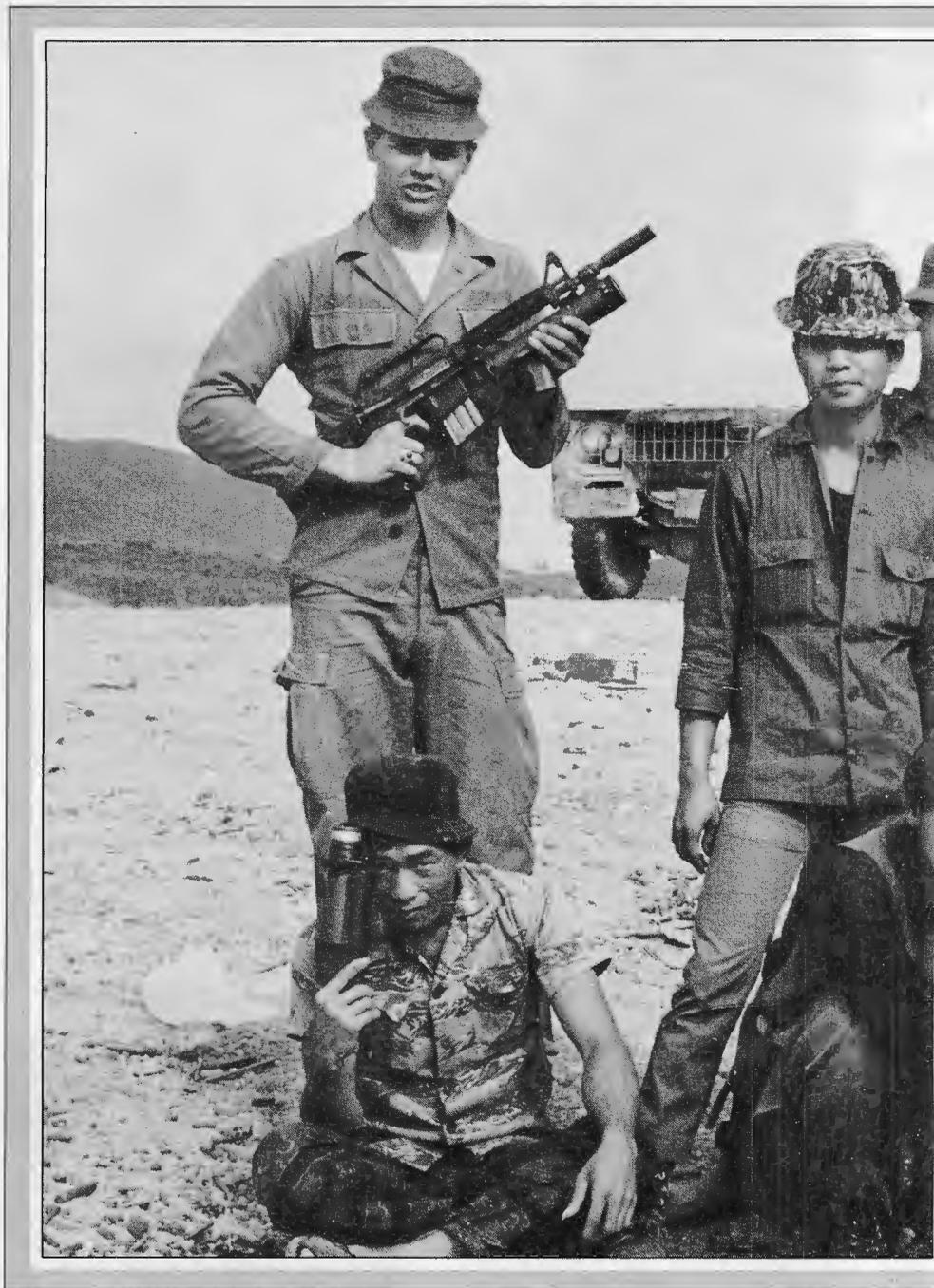
The NVA soldier was good. He only moved when the wind stirred the trees. During one windy moment, the NVA soldier touched the sole of my jungle boot. I heard him gasp.

It was pitch black. I couldn't see him. I wondered if he could see my CAR-15 pointing at him.

I didn't dare shoot. I was playing the biggest game of hide-and-seek in my life and I didn't want to alert this Charlie's buddies, most of whom were walking down the mountain, as to where we were.

When the wind next blew, he crawled back down the embankment. By 0400 hours, he and his buddy were heading down the stream. At first light, we moved northeast up the mountain, which seemed like the largest mountain on earth. We moved all day, reaching the top near last light. ST

Chopper pad at FOB #1, Phu Bai. H-34s are returning from supply run to Mai Loc.



SOG'S PORTABLE ARTILLERY

Operating beyond the reach of friendly artillery and with available air support often limited by weather, it's little wonder that SOG teams sought to maximize their own firepower assets. One of their most valuable weapons was the M79 40mm grenade launcher. Later the M203, also in 40mm and which attached to the M16, was used. But in addition to those two standard weapons, SOG teams at various times had access to experimental and locally modified grenade launchers.

Among these was the T-148, a magazine-fed 40mm launcher, of which a limited number were manufactured in the mid-1950s prior to development of the M79. Fed by a side-mounted, harmonica-type magazine, the weapon never entered serious production due to the adoption of the M79. It also was prone to failure as a result of weak magazine extractors, a problem which plagued it in Vietnam as well.

An example of a locally modified version was the double-barreled type. Two M79s were bracketed together and the buttstock was removed from one. Each barrel was operated by its own trigger mechanism. Simply sawing off the stock and barrel of an M79 was the most common modification seen in Vietnam.

Other versions of grenade launchers (such as a slide-action model) were used, but few specimens of these weapons were produced, few photos of them were taken, and it is not known if any of the individual weapons survived the war.

— G.B. Crouse

Spike team members at the Phu Bai range. Author, with XM148 grenade launcher, is standing far left. Spike Team Idaho member Bubba Shore is standing at far right.



Idaho was beat. The jungle we moved through was thick but not dense. Climbing all day had been tough on all of us. The only contact we had was when Son and Sau did a brief area recon and ran into some woodcutters — who quickly ran away.

About midnight, the sky cleared. There wasn't a cloud anywhere. We made radio contact with Batcat, codename for the airborne command ship that flew over the Prairie Fire AO 24 hours a day. I told him we were going to stay on the mountaintop all day, especially if the weather got bad.

By 0600 hours, the clouds had returned and we were socked in again. We gave Spider a team OK and healed our hiking wounds.

That night, while monitoring different FM frequencies, we picked up a Russian transmission.

A few months before this mission, we had heard about the Russians and Chinese working in "neutral" Laos, but this was the first time we had audio proof. Ivan was on the air, live at midnight. I tried to raise Batcat but couldn't.

With the long antenna on the PRC-25, I moved to the east side of the mountain and tried to contact Lemon Tree, a radio site manned by MACV-SOG personnel. Again, no luck.

While I was on the radio, Shore came around to my side of the mountain, his eyes wide open. "You've got to see this to believe it. I think we're in the Twilight Zone," he said.

As I monitored the Russian conversation, I walked around to the west side of the mountain. Shore just pointed west toward another one of the huge Laotian mountains,

which was lighting up like a massive Christmas tree.

It was after midnight. The Russians were on our radio. Soon we could hear Ivan's plane. Off to the west, the side of that mountain was lighting up brighter than Broadway in the Big Apple. Weird!

The Russians were flying in a resupply to the lighted side of the mountain. From our distance, the area appeared to be bigger than several football fields tacked together.

For several minutes ST Idaho simply stood there in amazement, gazing at the incredibly brilliant lights made all the brighter by the stark darkness of the cloudless jungle night.

By the time I raised someone on the radio, Ivan's plane had turned around and

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GENERAL RAHMATULLAH

SAFI

Afghan Leader Says War Going Well

Brigadier General Rahmatullah Safi, currently the director of the Military Training Academy for the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA — one of the seven major political/military groups that direct the Afghan resistance campaign against the Soviet invasion troops and diminishing troops of the Kabul puppet government) visited the Soldier of Fortune offices in Boulder, Colorado, in October 1987.

General Safi, school trained in the Soviet Union (Spetsnaz), England and the United States while serving under King Zahir Shah, is the most senior former Afghan army officer fighting with the Afghan freedom fighters, the mujahideen. While serving under the king, Safi founded the Afghan 444 Commando special forces and commanded this elite 1,600-man force until the king was overthrown by his prime minister and his nephew Daoud, who started Afghanistan down the course that led to the establishment of a communist puppet government in Kabul in 1978 and the Soviet invasion in 1979. From 1973 until 1976 Safi was held in the infamous Pul-i-Charki prison. Safi lived in England while recovering from the effects of the torture he underwent in prison and joined NIFA in late 1980.

SOF: What motivated you to go back to Afghanistan in 1980?

SAFI: I had a comfortable life in England and, believe you me, I would not have gone back if I were not a soldier and an officer. But because I was, I would have felt guilty if I had not gone back. Young men with no experience were fighting and dying. My responsibility was to go back and help. I was, after all, educated with their tax money, so it was my duty to pay my debt to the people.

SOF: In 1980 the Afghans were using tactics of tribal mountain warfare and weapons that were generally antiquated. How difficult was

by Jim Graves

Photos by Tom Slizewski



"We are fighting for the people of Afghanistan and we want to have a government which is the choice of the people. But not extremes. There is no place in Afghanistan for extremes."

it for you to sell a program that stressed the necessity of training and the adoption of modern mountain warfare tactics?

SAFI: It was hard. In the beginning we fought the Russians using emotion. If you tried to teach a young man to fire a mortar he would say to you, "Sir, what are you talking about? I'm ready to go. This is the mortar. This is the shell. You drop the shell in the mortar and *bang*, it's gone." But he didn't understand where it had gone to.

I had to tell them, "My dear boy, if you don't hit the enemy by the second or third round, he will kill you."

Teaching boys who had never been on an airplane, or even seen one, to lead aircraft was nearly impossible. They just couldn't understand that a bullet was not fast enough to catch an airplane.

We had to teach them not to play with the antipersonnel mines, that they were not toys.

In the beginning we would give them supplies to go off and fight with and they would say, "My God, it is heavy. Leave it."

We had to teach them that, with an RPG [Soviet-manufactured rocket-propelled grenade], if they had courage they could kill a tank.

We learned gradually, gradually. But now they ask for training.

SOF: Has NIFA been more receptive than other organizations to modernization of its methods and tactics? We have heard that some of the more conservative parties have resisted any changes.

SAFI: I cannot speak for the other parties, but I can say that NIFA is the only party that has over 700 former Afghan army officers. I have 8,000 students in my training academy, and all our operations today are planned and conducted by maps with logistical considerations taken into account.

For example, we planned Operation Avalanche for three months. [On 6 July 1987, between 3,000 and 4,000 NIFA fighters launched a coordinated series of attacks along the Kabul-Jalalabad highway, opening with an assault against the isolated outpost of Sorobi. The 1,000-man Soviet paratroop relief force coming to relieve the garrison at Sorobi was then pinned down on a twisting canyon-bottom road when the Afghans blew two bridges about 19 kilometers apart. Soviet losses in the 19-kilometer killing zone were put at 800 KIA, 150 vehicles (tanks, trucks, BMPs) destroyed, two jets and three helicopters downed.]

SOF: Are the victory at Sorobi and the equally great victories against Soviet forces at Jaji and Kandahar in the same month indicative that the war has swung to the Afghans?

SAFI: This has been the best year for all the mujahideen in Afghanistan. But before I get into the *jihad*, or the military side, I want to give you some explanation of the political side.

In 1987 the puppet government has been pleading for national reconciliation

— cease-fire. Why?

They are also saying they are willing to give up the communist government, the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Why then did they create it if they are willing to take it away?

Mr. Gorbachev himself is saying, "We made a great mistake. We want to withdraw our troops." Why?

Finally, this is all coming at a time when the puppets are taking some communists out of the government and replacing them with so-called neutralists. Why?

It is because they are under pressure from the fighting.

I give you two years as examples. In 1986 we had a bad year, very bad. We have different kinds of bases: living bases, supply bases, defense bases, attack bases. Last year we were stuck in the defense bases at best, and often not even in the defensive bases but in the living bases. And the Soviets could fly anywhere. They beat us with gunships, rockets and long-range artillery.

What changed? In the beginning of 1987 the mujahideen were in the attacking bases. They are on the front lines, hitting the big convoys. They are destroying the fuel dumps and lines, the supply depots, the power systems.

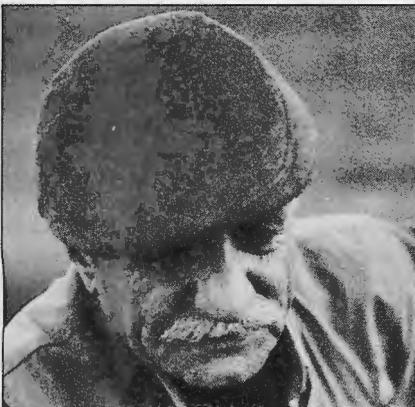
Now the aircraft are coming in very, very high and their bombing is not effective. The mujahideen are not scared of them anymore. Now we can grow things. The supply trucks are moving. We are driving jeeps inside. That is the result of their losing air superiority.

SOF: Stingers? [U.S.-supplied Stinger antiaircraft missiles started reaching Afghan fighters in the field in late 1986. Consequently, Soviet aircraft losses, before they changed their flight patterns, were running at one-and-a-half per day.]

SAFI: Yes, Stingers.

But also in the operations this year, like Avalanche, we showed that we are not on the defensive. We are on their neck. Second, we showed that we can

"I think once you have no choice, no alternative, morale will be high. And when you are fighting for the right purpose, your morale will always be high."



combine significant forces. Until this year the practice of the mujahideen has been to operate in their own tribal area, their district. But in Avalanche we had NIFA commanders from all the provinces around there.

And now we understand that we cannot survive by ourselves. Therefore, in many places we are running joint operations with other political groups.

I'll tell you what impact the Stinger has had. Following an operation in Kunar where we destroyed two of their medium-sized bases, they did not appear for three days. We learned that the Afghans and the Russians fought during that operation, each pushing the other to fly to the relief of Kunar. The Afghans said, "You are running our country. You fly."

SOF: Has the number of mujahideen been increasing?

SAFI: Our numbers have never decreased. Now, with more supplies coming in, our numbers are increasing. Our strength in the field is determined by the amount of supplies available. In my training camp I have over 8,000 now. The reason they are there is because we are having difficulty getting supplies to put them in the field.

SOF: In the past, mujahideen units were armed in a ratio of about 80/20 — Lee Enfields to Kalashnikovs. What is your basic small arm today?

SAFI: Most of the troops now have Kalashnikovs. Some still are with Lee Enfields, but sometimes that is because that is what they want.

SOF: Do you have enough 107mm rockets? [Chinese-made 107mm rockets, first deployed in 1985, are the backbone of the Afghan artillery.]

SAFI: You understand that I am not in a position to talk about arms stocks, but there are enough for our purposes. That is not to say that, compared with a superpower, we can say we have enough, but we can cope with it. Personally I am very happy.

SOF: There are reports that the resistance will receive long-range mortars this year. True?

SAFI: They are needed because in some places, like Soviet air bases or ammo depots, the perimeters go out quite some distance and, with the weapons we have, it is difficult to reach them. It is better to have a light, accurate, far-reaching weapon.

SOF: How have the 20mm Oerlikon cannons supplied by the United States worked for the Afghans?

SAFI: They are lovely, although they are not all that effective on aircraft. The sound and rate of fire bother the pilots and you can use them very effectively against ground troops. But now the aircraft are out of range of the Oerlikons.

SOF: We've heard reports that desertions have shriveled the Afghan army down to 20,000.

SAFI: If I tell you they are even less than 20,000 you wouldn't believe it, so let's say it is 20,000. Even their trained officers, once they have their diploma and they are going to some unit, rally to the mujahideen.



"The KGB ... will strike, penetrate inside Pakistan and try to upset the people by exploding bombs in Peshawar or other towns. And they will strike against the mujahideen leaders. I am not surprised because that is in their nature. Because on the ground, the actual fighting, they are inferior."

I don't see any kind of success for the Soviet side. Even the *Khalq* and the *Parcham* [the Communist Party of Afghanistan is split into these two factions along linguistic and ethnic lines] are still fighting each other. The Soviets have not been able to stop that. When they go into a meeting, the Soviet officers take their Kalashnikovs because they don't want them shooting each other. They are not capable of cooperation.

The local people in the town support us now more than ever. You know, the people living under the rule of the communists in the big towns like Kabul and Jalalabad are much better mujahideen than us. It takes courage for them to support us and their support is critical for our success.

SOF: We have heard that people are going back inside?

SAFI: Nonsense. Going for what?

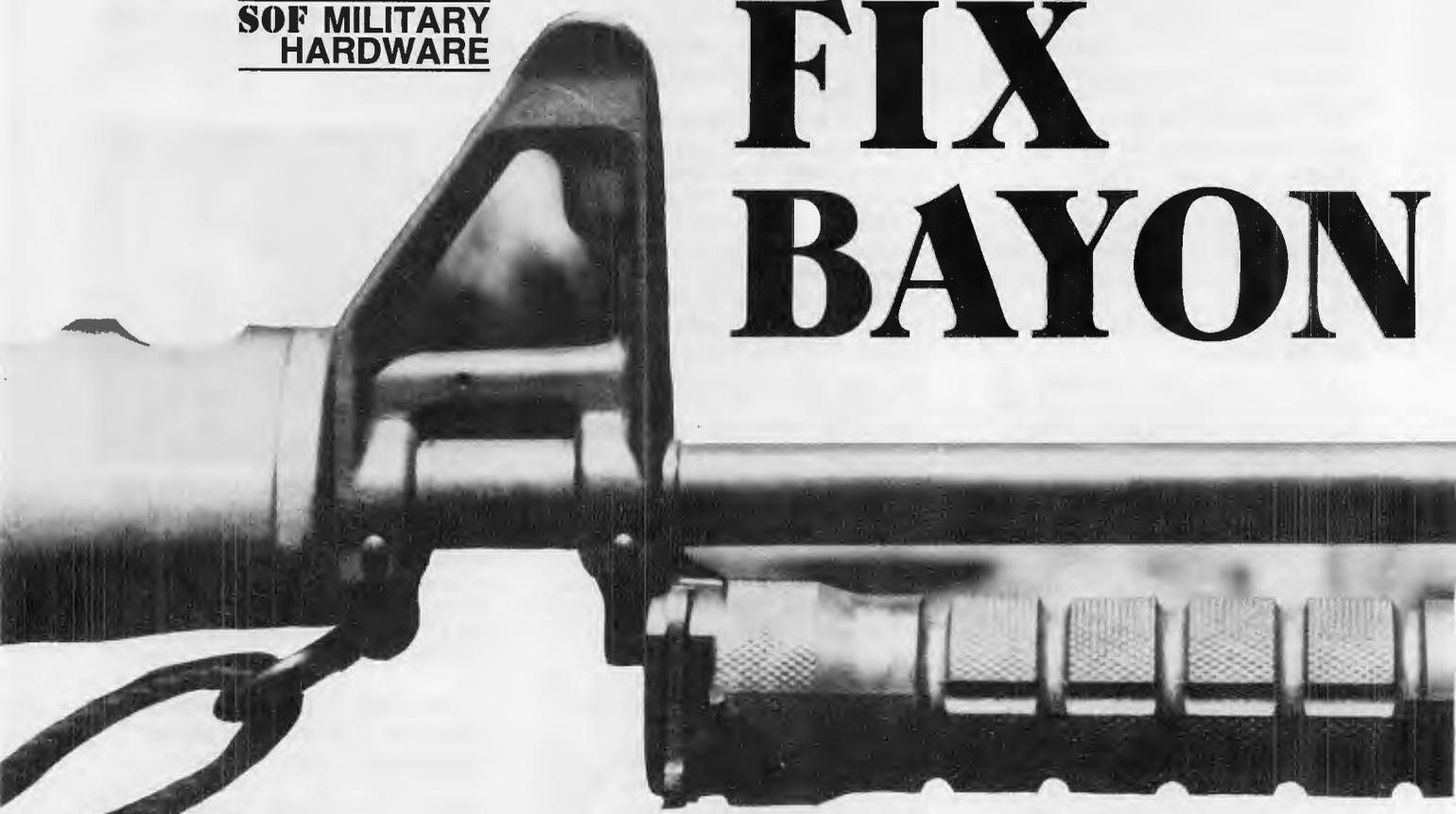
SOF: To farm.

SAFI: Oh, that's different. I thought you meant for the reconciliation. Forget that. There are still over 100,000 Russians in Afghanistan. There is still a communist regime. What has changed that they would go back? Why did they come out in the first place?

Of course everybody wants to go to their homeland. But the country is destroyed. If you are an ordinary person, I mean a farmer, and you go back, the Soviet army will kill you. If you are an educated person, the KGB will kill you. So you can't go there unless they withdraw those Soviet troops, unless the head of the communist government leaves.

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FIX BAYONET



M9 bayonet mounted on an AR-15. Bayonets have their uses, but are they an anachronism on the 20th-century battlefield?

DOES THE ARMY KNOW WHAT IT NEEDS?

The new M9 Multi-Purpose Bayonet System fulfills the Army's specifications to the letter and can exceed most performance specifications by 100 percent or more. By adopting the M9 MPBS the Army got precisely what it wanted; I'm just not sure that what the Army wanted is what the Army needed. While Phobis fulfilled Army specifications handily, I'm critical of some of the specifications in the first place, such as the weight limit and the wire cutting and saw requirements.

In an effort to get the Army's side of the story on the original specifications, SOF asked me to try to track down how the Army arrived at them. One would think I was asking for plans for the Stealth bomber. A call to Phobis got me the name of the procurement officer at Picatinney Arsenal. I called him but he refused to tell me anything without going through a public affairs officer (PAO) in Washington, DC. I called him

and he referred me to a PAO back in Picatinney. I called him and he promised me the information within a week. A week later he referred me to another PAO at Fort Benning. The PAO at Benning then referred me to a project officer at Benning. After more than a week of unreturned calls I finally reached the project officer. He was generally surly, evasive and only reluctantly cooperative in answering my questions.

Regarding weight specifications, he said that the proposed bayonet was required to do more than the M7, so they allowed it to weigh an *arbitrary* amount more. When I gave my opinion that 1.8 pounds was excessive considering that the M7 bayonet with scabbard weighs only about a pound, he said it was not excessive because the M9 replaced the M7 bayonet, a field knife (the Army does not issue a field knife) and a wire cutter.

I then questioned why they had required the wire cutter capability. He said because they knew it could be done and there was a need for a wire cutter. I was tempted to ask him why they had not specified it also include a folding tooth-

brush since they knew that could be done and there is a need for the soldier to brush his teeth, but I didn't.

When I made the observation that I found the M9 MPBS to be an awkward, inefficient and tactically unsound wire cutter, he said that it was never intended to be a tactical wire cutter. That would be done with explosives. He also said that the M9 MPBS was not intended to replace the normally issued wire cutters but only to be used when none were available, since every soldier was not issued a wire cutter. I neglected to point out that every soldier was not issued a bayonet either. Since we had now established that the M9 was not too heavy because it replaced the wire cutter, but that the wire cutter was not replaced by the M9, I moved on to the saw.

I mentioned that I found the saw to be nearly worthless at cutting wood, in spite of the original Army requirement that it do so. He said wood should be cut with the knife edge, and the saw was meant primarily for aluminum and Plexiglas. Since a soldier cutting his way out of a downed aircraft is a one-in-a-million happening versus his almost dai-

IN February 1987 the U.S. Army began receiving its first deliveries of the new Phrobis III-designed M9 Multi-Purpose Bayonet System (MPBS). The idea for the M9 MPBS was born when the powers-that-be in the Army finally realized that the bayonet is rarely used by combat soldiers as a weapon, but is used much more often as a

tool. In fact, if bayonets were only used as weapons, most soldiers wouldn't bother to carry them. The M9 MPBS is designed for mounting on the M16A1 and A2 rifles, but it's intended to be far more than just a bayonet.

The current-issue M7 bayonet, which the M9 will eventually replace for all close-combat type troops such as infantry, combat engineers and Rangers, is far from state-of-the-art as a knife or a bayonet. First, it rusts easily. Second, many M7s have been produced with improper edge bevels combined with blades so hard that they can't be sharpened conventionally. This gave them the

were a series of performance requirements. Most important were that the system must perform as a bayonet, field knife and wire cutter; it must be able to cut double twisted barbed wire, standard metal bands and ribbon-type barbed wire as well as stand up to a charge of 240 volts when cutting electrified wire; the saw back must be capable of cutting through light sheet metal and a .5-inch hemp rope, and saw through a 1-inch piece of hardwood; and the blade must be readily sharpened with an attached sharpening system.

Entries were submitted by six firms: three in the U.S. — Imperial, Phrobis and S-Tron; and foreign entries from Eichhorn of West Germany, Marto of Spain and Royal Ordnance of England. A total of 55 samples of each entry were field-tested by a mixed

ETS

Army's New M9 Based on Suspect Specs

Text & Photos by
Charles Karwan



ly need to cut wood when in the field, this emphasis on cutting aluminum made little sense to me. When I said the knife edge cut aluminum about as well as the saw, he said that didn't surprise him.

I tried to discuss what I felt were flaws in the nondevelopmental procurement program as it was being administered, like the lack of incentive to significantly beat specifications such as weight. When he accused me of just wanting to criticize the M9 bayonet "like everyone else," I remembered why I had left the Army.

It seems to me that the Army got a far better bayonet in the M9 MPBS than it deserved considering the shallow thinking that went into its specifications. Troop acceptance has been excellent, and its field performance indicates that it's superior to the M7 bayonet in virtually every performance criteria, though it is far heavier. Adopting the M9 increases every rifleman's basic load about .8 pounds, even the guy who is issued the regular wire cutter. Whether or not the extra weight is justified remains to be seen, as is troop reaction when it comes time to go to war with it.

reputation of being good "pig stickers" but poor field/utility knives. To make matters worse, a high percentage of M7 blades would break when subjected to the stress of a bayonet assault course. This was because of improperly heat-treated blades, not because of any inherent design fault.

If all that were not enough to cause the Army to look for a new bayonet, many felt that the M7 was inferior to the Soviet AKM knife bayonet. The Soviet bayonet could be used as a bottle opener, a saw for light metal and wood and, when combined with its scabbard, a wire cutter.

The Army did not want to spend the time or go to the expense of developing its own new bayonet. Instead, it drew up a series of specifications for a new bayonet and submitted these to the cutlery industry. The Army could then test the samples submitted and select the one that best fulfilled its specifications.

Without listing all of the Army's specifications, I'll mention the key points. The blade could not be longer than 8 inches and it had to extend at least 4 inches past the muzzle of the rifle when fixed. It had to have a clipped point with the false edge sharpened and with its back serrated. The entire system was not to exceed 1.8 pounds. Materials had to be corrosion resistant, with a non-reflective finish. In addition, there

group of infantry soldiers, including combat veterans, newbies, Rangers and parachutists, experienced and inexperienced. When the dust settled there was one clear and undisputed winner — Phrobis.

The M9 had no performance test failures at all. Further, when testers were asked to rate the bayonets in different categories, they unanimously rated Phrobis first as a bayonet, field knife, combat knife and wire cutter as well as in overall preference.

Phrobis' bayonet was the second most

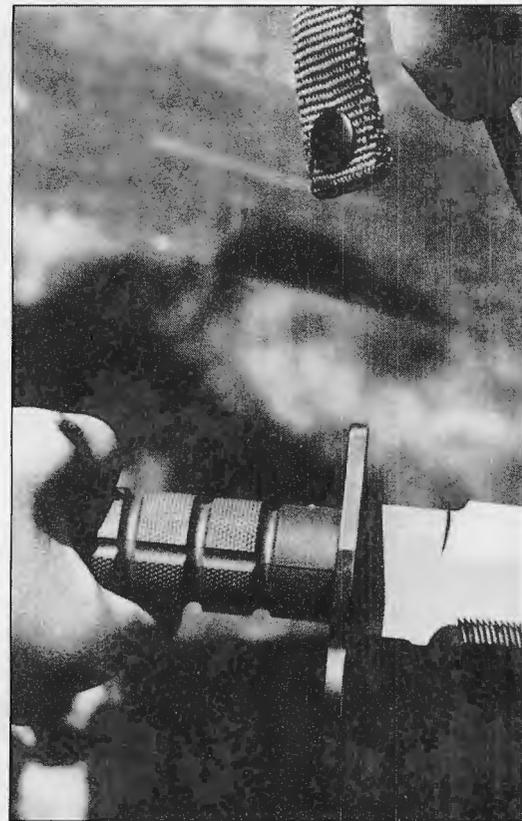
FIELD TESTED

Author Chuck Karwan's opinions on the Army's new bayonet system come from years of experience as a combat soldier. After graduating from West Point, Chuck went on to attend Ranger School, Panama's JOTC, airborne and jumpmaster training and the Special Forces Officer's Course. He served in Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) and the 10th and 5th Special Forces groups.

He's published over 100 articles and is a monthly columnist for *Gun World* and *Shooting Industry* magazines. We welcome his first feature article for SOF.



ABOVE: M9 bayonet disassembled to its major components. Modular construction allows easy replacement of damaged parts, including the blade, without major overhaul.



two circular cutouts that remove a bit of weight and can be used as a convenient bottle opener, an important feature to many soldiers.

The sheath of the M9 has a number of unique features. Besides the stud and wire cutter plate that converts the system to a wire cutter, the sheath also has a screwdriver at its tip, a sharpening stone on its back covered by a web strap with a snap closure, and a quick-release Fastex buckle that allows the sheath to be separated from the Bianchi belt fastener that attaches the whole assembly to the soldier's web gear. The bayonet is retained in its scabbard by two restraining straps as well as a spring retention device. The scabbard also has an optional detachable nylon pouch that can

M9 bayonet (top) and the M7 bayonet it's replacing in Army combat units.

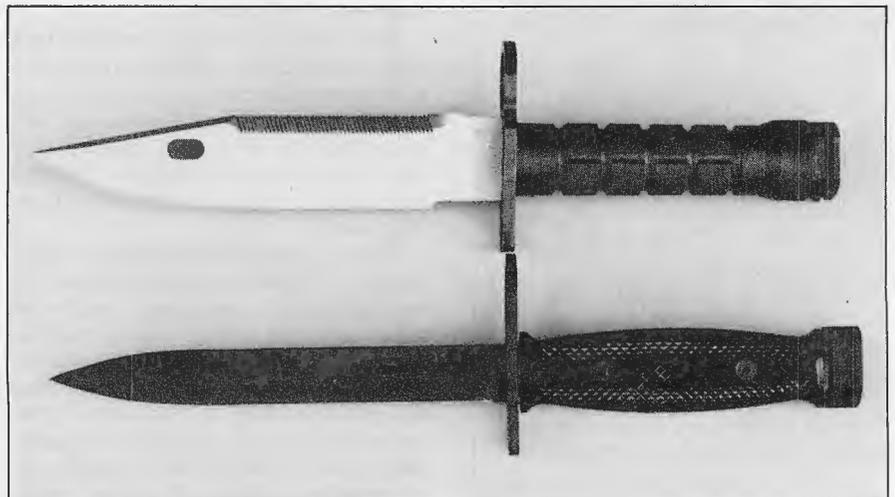
expensive entry in the trials, so the lowest bidder was not picked. However, prior to the tests the Army procurement people had done a cost analysis of what the proposed bayonet should cost, and their estimate was nearly identical to the Phrobis bid. Thus, the Pentagon was able to procure the best bayonet in the trials even though it was far from the cheapest.

The M9 is a handsome beast very reminiscent of a Bowie knife with its clipped pointed blade. The top edge is not sharpened like a knife, but instead is sharpened like a shear or scissor so the top edge can be used as a wire cutter. The right side of the thick, hollow ground blade has a deep fuller, or "blood groove," to remove some weight. The result is a balance point right behind the guard which gives the bayonet lively handling characteristics when used as a knife.

Both the handle and scabbard are made from super-tough Dupont Zytel 8018 in an olive drab color. The crossguard and latch assembly are made from more conventional carbon steels such as 4140, with a rust-resistant dull black finish. The blade and its screw on the tang extension are made from 425 modified stainless steel. The blade is slightly over 7 inches long, 1.44 inches wide and .23 inches thick. It is blanked and drop forged to shape prior to grinding and polishing. The steel used for the blade is a relatively new one designed specifically for cutlery applications. Its major components besides the basic iron are .54 percent carbon, 13.5 percent chromium, 1.0 percent molybdenum and .35 percent of both silicon and manganese. It is designed to be a fine grained steel of superior edge-holding characteristics. Phrobis has also gone to the trouble of using a zone hardening procedure that makes the edge harder than the tang and other areas of the blade.

A prominent feature of the M9's blade is the oblong hole 2 inches back from the point. This hole, when combined with a

stud on the scabbard, converts the bayonet into a wire cutter. The back of the M9's blade has a type of sawtoothed edge slightly under 3 inches long. It is primarily intended to make the bayonet capable of cutting light aluminum sheeting as used on the skin of most military aircraft. The teeth are located below the back of the blade and are angled forward. This is important both to prevent the teeth from hindering the penetration of the bayonet when it is used as a weapon and to prevent the sawteeth from acting as barbs when it is being extracted. I personally know of a case where a custom combat knife with high sawteeth angled to the rear on its back was used to dispatch an NVA. My friend who did the dispatching could only get the knife out of the victim after considerable delay and difficulty. The sawteeth on the M9 should give no such problems. Behind the blade on the crossguard there are





One of Army's major specifications required the M9 to cut wire like its Soviet counterpart. However, it's awkward, inefficient and tactically unsound as a wire cutter, requiring two hands to operate. And incidentally, watch your fingers!

hold such things as a Swiss Army knife, Leatherman tool, a folding lock-back knife or other small items.

Though the individual soldier is instructed not to in the operator's manual, the screwdriver on the sheath can be used to disassemble the bayonet. The M9 can be readily disassembled due to its rather unique modular construction. There is a tang extension that screws onto the blade that extends back to the latch assembly. To disassemble the bayonet one needs only to remove the cap screw in the butt cap with the screwdriver on the sheath. The latch assembly and the handle can then be pulled off to the rear and the tang extension can be screwed off the blade, although this will normally require a wrench to loosen. Finally the crossguard can be lifted off. This clever construction allows damaged parts, including the blade, to be easily replaced within a few minutes. The juncture of the tang extension and the threaded portion of the blade's tang is so strong that the blade or tang itself will break before the two will separate.

Since the new M9 bayonet is supposed to have a primary role as a field knife, I was disappointed that Army specifications gave no consideration to a modified mounting system that would do away with the muzzle ring on the crossguard. Invariably the muzzle mounting rings on bayonets are in the way when they are being used as a knife. This is particularly true when you need to

put your thumb on the back of the blade to increase pressure when cutting or slicing. It would have been simple to use a modified washer under the flash suppressor of the M16. The washer would need only a small extension downward with a rectangular hole in it. The top of the bayonet's crossguard then would only need a matching rectangular stud and the muzzle ring could be dispensed with altogether, making the bayonet a much handier knife.

While researching this article, I was invited by the Phrobis company to visit their test facility and interview Mickey Finn, president and mastermind behind Phrobis III Ltd. and the M9 bayonet. After observing and duplicating a number of the Army's acceptance tests, I can say one thing for sure: This is one tough bayonet!

One of the tests has the front 1.5 inches of the blade clamped in a vise-like fixture. The

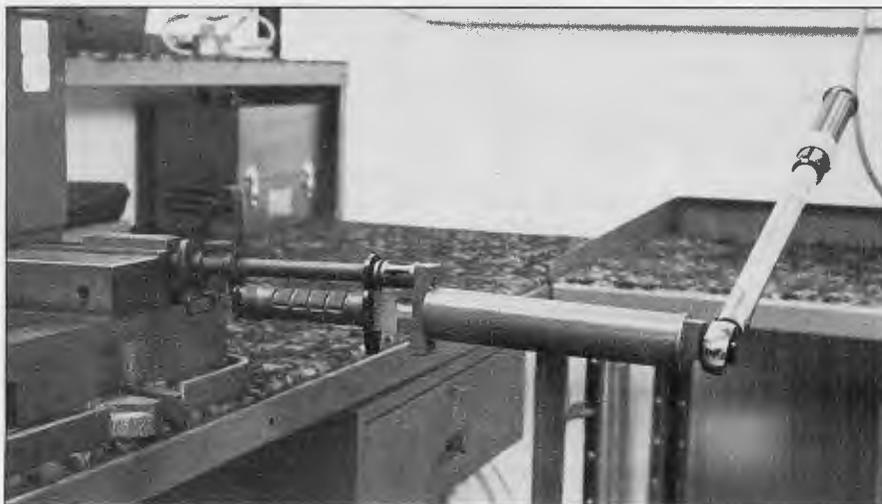
grip is then deflected in a 1.25-inch arc from the vertical to both sides. This is done in sub-zero, hot and normal temperatures. The Army allows up to 3/16-inch permanent deformation. The typical M9 bayonet not only handles this abuse easily with no deformation but can also handily withstand more than 100 percent more deflection. Remember we are talking about a stainless steel blade nearly .25-inch thick being bent in an arc over 2.5 inches at its butt without failure even at sub-zero temperatures. The blade of the M9 acts like a leaf spring under side pressure and has the added assistance of a very tough handle that has its own built-in give, to support the blade tang area. Sure, the M9 can be broken, but not easily.

Another test calls for the M9 to be frozen to a specified extreme sub-zero temperature then dropped from a 4-foot height onto a concrete surface on its point, on its butt and horizontally. The net result was a slight burr on the still-sharp bayonet point with no other discernible effect. Many knives or bayonets would just shatter under this test.

Other tests I witnessed included impact with a wood block-faced weight falling 18 inches onto the point of the bayonet mounted on a portion of the M16 barrel, 25 feet/pound torque applied to the bayonet blade while mounted on a portion of the M16 barrel, sharpness, latching mechanism, wire cutting, interchangeability of parts, serrated edge cutting aluminum sheet, and several others.

A number of interesting facts came to light during the tests. I noticed when I received my two test bayonets for evaluation that the edges of both bayonets had been ground with a very coarse stone or abrasive. Phrobis found that to consistently pass the Army's sharpness test, which dates back to a 1917 twine-cutting requirement that defies modern industry standards, the edge had to be relatively rough. Bayonets given a razor-like edge, as would be used on a hunting knife, would often fail the test. To quote Mickey Finn, "A razor won't pass the

One regular performance standard required a 25-foot/pound torque test while M9 is mounted.



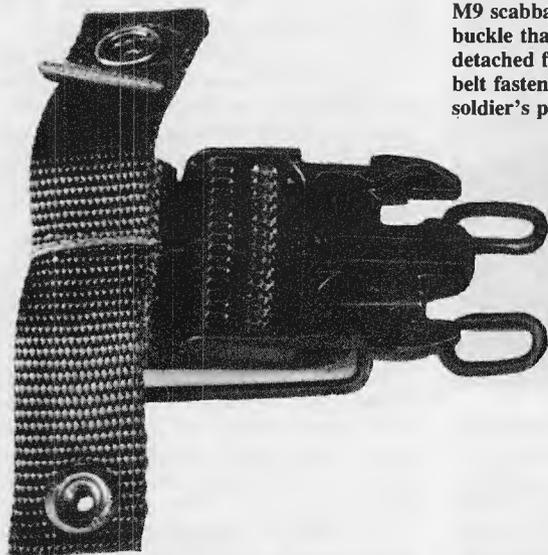
Army's sharpness test, but a hacksaw will." So when you're issued an M9 bayonet don't blame Phrobis for the rough edge, blame the Army. In fairness to the Army, the coarse, almost sawtoothed wire edge that the bayonet comes with or has when it is sharpened with the stone on the back of the scabbard does cut most materials such as flesh, rope and soft wood rather well. Just don't try to shave with it.

To say that the M9 exceeds the Army's requirements for the serrated or sawtoothed edge on the back of the bayonet is a gross understatement. The Army requires it must

cut 18 inches of 2024 aluminum alloy sheeting .025 inches thick mounted in a test fixture in *one hour*. After that it must cut through .5-inch hemp rope using a sawing motion. The aluminum sheeting is designed to approximate the skin of a downed military aircraft. The M9 will rip through the required 18 inches of aluminum and likewise through the hemp rope in about *10 seconds* with ease.

However, I noticed that the normal knife edge side of the blade cuts through the aluminum nearly as well and through the hemp rope even better, making the saw largely

superfluous, especially since I found the saw to be poor at cutting military nylon rope and perfectly miserable at cutting wood. Finn said that he realized that the saw was inefficient on wood but he had limited choices in its design. Phrobis had previously submitted several different very efficient sawtoothed patterns such as chisel tooth and double offset teeth patterns that cut wood extremely well, but the Army surgeon general disapproved them. Presumably this is because the surgeon general felt that the more aggressive-looking saw patterns might be considered *cruel* weapons that could be considered to cause unnecessary suffering under one of the international mil-



M9 scabbard and its quick-release Fastex buckle that allows the scabbard body to be detached for use as a wire cutter. Bianchi belt fastener remains attached to the soldier's pistol belt.



DO WE NEED A BAYONET?

Should a soldier carry a bayonet or not? Whenever a new rifle is adopted without the facility to mount a bayonet there is a clamor to add one. But once troops are given the bayonet to carry it's either too heavy or should be a better field knife, machete, saw or even wire cutter.

Originally there was no doubt about the need for a bayonet. In the days of single-shot weapons, a soldier needed his rifle or musket to be a lethal weapon even when it was empty. In those early days the bayonet was used to convert the shoulder arm to a type of pike to prevent being overrun by opposing cavalry. It later developed into a weapon of close assault.

The invention of repeating arms quickly threw the bayonet's worth as an offensive assault weapon into question. This was apparent in the American Civil War but was never as obvious as in the battle of Plevna on 30 July 1877 when a great Russian army massed against Turkish defenses armed with 30,000 newly acquired Winchester M1866 repeating rifles. When the Russian forces advanced with fixed bayonets for the

final overwhelming bayonet assault, they encountered a withering hail of .44-caliber bullets. Divisions of 10,000 men were cut in half in minutes. Slow to learn and insensitive to casualties, the Russians tried again, using the same tactics two months later with the same result. They lost 30,000 men in such useless bayonet assaults!

Still the bayonet persisted and it saw use in World War I, often tragically in assaults against machine-gun equipped troops. The concept of the bayonet as an offensive assault weapon should have died on the fields of Flanders or Gallipoli. Our own Corporal Alvin York single-handedly stopped a bayonet-charging German squad in WWI with seven shots from his M1911 .45 ACP pistol, resulting in seven downed Germans and firmly establishing the trained, pistol-equipped soldier's superiority to several bayonet fighters.

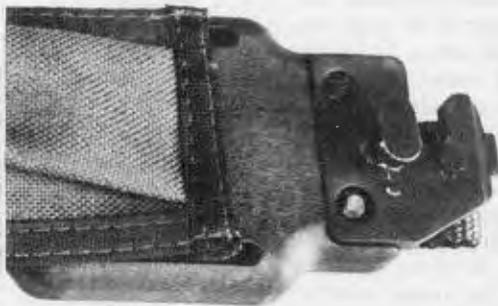
By WWII only Japan still made common use of bayonet assaults, finding out repeatedly that when it was tried against semiautomatic rifle-armed troops like U.S. forces, the usual result was that a lot of Japanese soldiers went to meet their ancestors. Still, on both sides the occasional successful bayonet assault persisted in perpetuating the myth of the "Code of the Bayonet."

Much is currently made by proponents about the British use of the bayonet in the Falkland Islands. It saw significant use, particularly in night fighting, on several occasions. Supposedly the British killed more enemy with the bayonet than with pistols and knives combined. No one seems to bother to mention the fact that the British issue practically no pistols or knives to conventional infantry. Likewise overlooked is that Gurkha troops who served in the Falklands beside their British cousins did not carry the bayonet, depending instead on their traditional kukris.

There are three combat uses for a bayonet: as an emergency weapon, as when a position is overrun; as a silent killing or close combat weapon, as on night patrols or raids; and as a tool, as when one clears a field of fire. In addition, the bayonet serves remarkably well in a non-combat role as a riot control weapon. Believe me, crowds are much less prone to push a troop formation with extended fixed bayonets! The first three uses can also be accomplished by a good combat knife, and a good handgun makes a far superior emergency weapon in almost every case. The role as a riot control weapon for rifle-armed troops can only be accomplished with a bayonet.

itary conduct agreements. These agreements are the ones that outlaw expanding bullets but allow napalm. Need I say more?

One more interesting thing came to light during the wire cutting tests. The military-issue M9 cut wire better than the commercial M9 example which I had previously tested. The commercial M9 is sold under the Buck name. Presumably to limit their product liability, Buck has changed the wire cutter plate on the bayonet scabbard to include a limit stud. This limit stud lessens the chance of an operator cutting himself by having his fingers between the bayonet and scabbard when cutting wire. Buck has also put a decal on the commercial M9 scabbard face that shows a hand with four cut-off fingers between the words "DANGER



There is also the combat handgun to consider. The new M9 bayonet weighs the same as a Glock 17 9mm loaded with 18 rounds. Which would you rather have in combat — an airweight S&W Chief Special plus a 13-ounce bayonet or just a 1.8 pound bayonet? I know my choice.

It is possible to make a good light-weight combination field knife and bayonet, as evidenced by the current-issue Finnish bayonet, which weighs in at only 10 ounces with scabbard. It has a 6.5-inch blade with nylon handle and is nearly indestructible. However, it isn't designed to cut wire or aluminum sheeting, saw wood, open bottles, be a screwdriver or any of the other extra requirements of the U.S. Army. It's just a hell of a fine knife and weapon.

My personal feeling is that it would have made more sense for the Army to adopt a lighter bayonet and scabbard and then issue a lightweight tool similar to the Leatherman as a wire cutter, which could even contain efficient wood saw and metal-cutting hacksaw blades. The tool could even be carried in a pouch on the bayonet scabbard and could also be issued to people such as machine gunners who are not issued a bayonet or wire cutters. Maybe the Marines will give such a system a try.

AREA." Below this is a dashed line and the statement, "WARNING! When using wire cutter, keep fingers this side of dashed line." Unfortunately, the decal is completely covered by the pouch on the front of the scabbard. The net result of this change by Buck is that the limit stud does not allow the bayonet to shear off the wire as it would usually do. Instead it forces the bayonet to pinch through the wire against the stud itself. In addition, the wire-cutting edge on the back of the bayonet impacts directly on the hardened stud, quickly dulling and damaging the cutting edge. While the commercial M9 obviously has some safety advantages over the military-issue version, it does cut down the efficiency of the system as a wire cutter.

So that I could give SOF readers a thorough personal evaluation of the M9 MPBS, I subjected my test pair to many different tasks over a period of several months. First, I gave one M9 to my wife to use in the kitchen for slicing and chopping meat and vegetables and cutting through bone. It was exposed to water, salt, blood, acidic vegetable juices and more. I found the M9 to be extremely rust resistant. Even the non-stainless metallic parts showed no sign of rust because of their highly rust-resistant finish. The blade proved to be too thick to be efficient at slicing, but it still worked reasonably well. I also performed a test with a couple of racks of pork ribs substituting for human ribs. I was a little skeptical about whether the M9's single-edged thick blade would be effective against the bony parts of an enemy's anatomy. I found that the M9 would penetrate the ribs quite easily. It would either slide off the bone and penetrate between the ribs or, with moderate effort, penetrate the ribs themselves. Because of its thicker and broader blade, the M9 made much more severe wounds than those of an M7.

To test its utility as a field knife I used it for a wide variety of tasks, such as cutting brush as would be done to clear a field of fire, cutting poles for a litter or lean-to, sharpening stakes, etc. The results were mixed. First, the saw was virtually worthless cutting wood. If you were going to cut just one hardwood pole with the saw, you had better pack a lunch. Using the edge side for chopping for the same task is better but not very good either.

I enlisted the aid of a very experienced and field-wise sergeant major in Special Forces. I had him try to chop through a 2.5- to 3-inch thick hardwood pole with the M9. It took 3.5 minutes to get halfway through and by then he had a blister on his hand. In about the same time I was able to cut completely through the pole with my Swiss Army pocketknife saw blade. It took me about four minutes to do the same thing using a much lighter and thinner Norwegian Army field knife with no blisters or discomfort. It's a shame that the M9 saw is not better at cutting wood because it would be useful. In Vietnam on recon patrols I would not let my troops do *any* chopping because the noise would carry too far. When we set

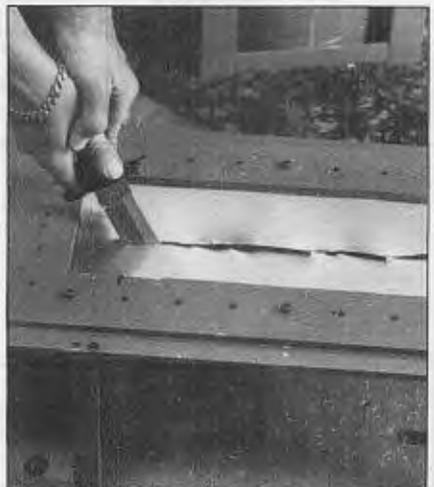
up sleeping and fighting positions, all brush clearing was done by whittling or slicing with field knives or by sawing with small hand saws.

I did find the M9 to have enough weight to chop through light brush and sharpen stakes, poles and pegs. My friend's blister points out one thing I do not like about the M9 — its handle. While I like the ruggedness of the material from which it's constructed, I do not like its shape or sharp edges. The handle is round in cross-section, according to Phrobis to allow for a great versatility of grips. In fact, a round handle offers a satisfactory grip in every position, but an excellent grip in none. Also it offers poor resistance to torque: I found that it would often twist painfully in my hand when chopping. For a tool like a knife, a handle oval in cross-section with a central swelling offers a satisfactory grip in every position and an excellent one in one or two primary-use positions. In my opinion even the shape of the M7 handle is far superior to that of the M9. The M9 handle is also checkered and has circular and longitudinal grooves. While it offers a secure grip it also offers a lot of abrasive edges that can irritate the hand.

State-of-the-art in knife handles are the rubbery substances like Kraton and Hypalon. These offer significant advantages in shock absorption, security and comfort. The M9 would be better if the handle could be made or coated with such a material. One last point on the handle: You are bound to hear someone criticize it because its round shape does not allow the soldier to know the orientation of the blade by feel in the dark. That's nonsense, because the feel of the crossguard readily transmits blade orientation.

During wire-cutting tests, I found that, although the M9 MPBS *would* cut wire, it has a number of drawbacks in that mode. First, it takes two hands, one on the scabbard and one on the bayonet, to cut wire. When one is cutting loose comms, demo or barbed wire, the wire is usually held in one hand and cut with the wire cutter held in the

M9 will rip through 18 inches of aluminum sheet in about 10 seconds — not a task combat troops face very often.



other. Using the M9 there is no free hand to hold the wire, so the system is awkward and inefficient at best. It also takes far more effort than cutting wire with one-handed plier-type cutters. In a tactical situation you'd probably have to put down your rifle to use it. Also it is extremely difficult and potentially dangerous to use in poor light if you leave a finger or two between the scabbard and bayonet.

It's interesting to note here that the Soviet version is terribly difficult to use and it's inefficient as well. If the M9 wire-cutting capability is viewed as an emergency feature for use when there is no other wire cutter available, it makes some sense. However, if the thinking is that wire cutters will now no longer be needed, I believe the thinking's faulty. I certainly recommend that the present issue of wire cutters to radio operators, signalmen, engineers and the like be maintained. Unfortunately, Army spokesmen are quick to point out that the M9 MPBS replaces two or three tools with one. Don't you believe it.

This also brings up another matter: M9 MPBS' weight. It weighs more than the M7 and a good pair of lightweight wire cutters like the Leatherman tool. In fact, you could also toss in a Swiss Army Ranger utility knife and you would just equal the weight of the M9 MPBS. Frankly, I feel that it is far heavier than it needs to be. All the lighter entries into the trials had performance failures, but none of them were designed by

Phrobis. I would bet next month's paycheck that Phrobis could have come up with a lighter bayonet system that could accomplish all the requirements if there had been an incentive to do so. However, Army specifications only required that they stay under 1.8 pounds. Finn admits that he used every last bit of that weight to overengineer the M9's performance capabilities by a full 100 percent or more. He told me he came so close to the limit that, if the blade fuller or bottle opening relief cuts were not included, the M9 would be overweight.

“Phrobis could have come up with a lighter bayonet . . . if there had been an incentive to do so.”

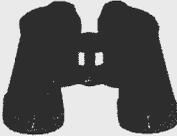
My test of the M9 revealed a number of other things. First, having a sharpening stone integral to the system is a great idea. The stone on the system worked satisfactorily in spite of its small size. I found that the Fastex buckle which allows the scabbard to be quickly detached from the belt rattled too much for night or recon patrol use. This

buckle was an Army requirement, so Phrobis isn't to blame. I expect patrol leaders will have the Fastex buckle thoroughly taped so it won't rattle, which will also prevent detaching the scabbard for wire cutting duty. The entire assembly is held to the superb Bianchi belt fastener by only two hollow rivets. While I must admit that they seem adequate in strength when new, I strongly suspect that they will give trouble once the heads of the rivets receive some wear. To Phrobis' credit, they intend to go to solid stainless steel rivets if they can get Army approval.

I was curious to know how the strike of the bullet is affected by firing with the bayonet fixed. I was surprised to find that, on the particular AR-15 I tried, which was one of the older, light-barreled models, the strike of the bullet was a couple of inches higher at 50 yards with the bayonet fixed than without the bayonet. Regardless, it did not change the point of impact enough to cause a miss at assault ranges.

Because of its sturdy construction, the M9 will also be very useful around the typical ammunition supply point. It can be slipped under bands and easily break them with a lever motion. It can pry open crates and in general serve as a sharpened pry bar.

The contract awarded to Phrobis calls for delivery of 315,600 M9 MPBSs over a three-year period at a cost of \$49.56 per copy. Actual manufacture is being conducted by Buck Knives Inc., one of this

 UNDERWATER/SURVIVAL 			
<p>Gerber BMF Knife The ultimate edge - 8" Bowie blade with chisel tooth saw. Overall length 13". 1/4" thick blade. Weight: 15 oz without sheath, 28.5 oz with. Constructed from carbon surgical stainless steel, honed to a razor's edge. Rockwell c54-55 hardness! New, improved sheath features clips, compass, sharpening hone, and heavy Cordura construction. Lifetime warranty. Retail \$160.00 Sale \$109.95</p> 	<p>Chronosport The name in divers watches! All black, multi function analog/digital combination, alarm, rotating bezel, sweep second hand, timer, two time zones, more! With nylon strap - Retail \$462.00 Sale \$346.50 With bracelet - Retail \$545.00 Sale \$408.75</p> 	<p>Compact SCUBA Ready to use - just add air. Two cubic foot cylinder with attached regulator for air to ascent from 90 feet, or for short period of submersion. 17 1/2" long, 2 1/2" wide, and weighs only a few pounds. Retail \$190.00 Sale \$149.95</p> 	<p>Survival System Tekna's Wilderness Edge weighs only 14 oz with sheath, measures 10 1/2" long, and has a surgical stainless steel 6 blade. The knife handle houses a Splash Light under a hinged panel, while the sheath contains a full survival system - signal mirror, survival guide, fishing reel, hooks, compass, and fire starter! Model T-6300 Retail \$129.95 Sale \$109.95</p> 
<p>Camouflage rubber coated</p> <p>7X35 with rapid focus, carry case, strap. Measures approx. 7 X 5 X 2". Model 139. \$85.00</p> 	<p>Camouflage rubber coated</p> <p>7X50 with rapid focus, carry case, strap. Measures approx. 7 X 8 X 2 1/2". Model 140. \$99.95</p> 	<p>Black rubber coated</p> <p>Nikon Tropical 7X50, individual focus for each eye, includes special lens covers, strap. Measures approx. 8 1/2 X 8 1/2 X 3". Model 750HP1F. Retail \$630.00 Sale \$399.95</p> 	<p>Compact Nikon</p> <p>9X25, with center focus, carry case, strap. Porro prism, measures approx 4 1/2 X 4 X 4 1/4". Model 925CF. Retail \$190.00 Sale \$119.95</p> 
<p>U.S. TECH SCUBA All American made equipment! Shadow all black BCD with power, pack, large pockets, and more, ARIS series Explorer regulator with ARIS octopus, Datacom double console (PS/Depth), and Aluminum 80 K cylinder with boot. Retail over \$1000.00 Sale \$579.95</p> 	<p>Dive Flasher Ideal for diver location, rescue work, or marking. O-Ring sealed. Uses one C cell battery. Waterproof to 150'. Measures approx. 5" X 1 1/4". \$29.95</p> 	<p>Mini Flash Light Features pocket clip, magnet in butt, transparent housing. Screw down lens to turn on. Very bright. Uses two AAA batteries (included). Overall length 4 3/4", 3/4" wide. By Pelican. \$8.95</p> 	<p>Mask, Snorkel, Fin Package Graphite black fins with vented blade and open heel, silicone mask with tempered glass, and large bore silicone snorkel. Rugged, high quality, great for snorkeling or SCUBA. Retail \$140.00 Sale \$84.95</p> 
<p>How to order: Call us at (312) 763-1669 (SOF1NOW) or send your order to Underwater, 6674 Northwest Hwy., Chicago, IL 60631. We accept Master Card, Visa, American Express, and Discover Card. Include your card number and expiration with order. We will also accept money orders and certified checks. Sorry, no COD's. Shipping: Include \$3.00 for orders under \$50.00, \$6.00 for orders under \$150.00, and \$9.00 for orders over \$150.00. Caution: You must be certified in the use of SCUBA before attempting to dive. A division of Berry Industries.</p>			

country's best cutlery manufacturers. As of July 1987 more than 45,000 M9s had been delivered. SOF readers should note that Buck will also be producing the M9 bayonet for commercial sale.

The M9 MPBS is an impressive piece of equipment. It is tough beyond belief and a decidedly lethal weapon as both a knife and a bayonet. It is handsome in its own right and should serve the soldier as a useful basic tool. Both Phrobis and Buck can be proud that they have done their best to give the American soldier the best bayonet in the world.

M9 Update

Since I finished this article on the M9 MPBS I have several times encountered rumors to the effect that the Army had rejected the first 45,000 M9 bayonets. The first time I heard the rumor I was almost sure it was false but when I heard it from widely separate sources it seemed that I should do some investigating. The fact is that the rumor is *false*. The M9 MPBS is produced in lots of 1,080 pieces. Eighty pieces are actually tested under Army quality control supervision right at the Phrobis facility. On successful completion of the tests, the Army representative signs for the entire lot. To date every lot has been accepted. Deliveries actually began in February 1987 with 1,000, in March 5,000, in April 9,000, and 10,000 every month afterward. From the standpoint of quality manufacture and meet-

ing the Army's desired performance, the M9 MPBS is without peer in the world of bayonets. ✕

SHOT OUT OF LAOS

Continued from page 67

headed north.

When I issued our first verbal report, the radio operator was incredulous: "You saw what? Where? The pilot was speaking what language?"

To complicate matters, in the morning when Spider flew over asking for further details on our sighting, we learned that our map was missing a couple of mountains in this particular range, which made it more difficult to report where we were and where Ivan's DZ was.

By 0700 we were socked in again. We hadn't heard the dogs in over 24 hours, so I sent Sau and Son out to find the tank trail while Shore and Tuan went out to find some water. During the night, my tooth had fallen apart, and I was in much pain. Because King was carrying a slide-action 40mm grenade launcher, I kept him on the hill with me.

Shore and Tuan observed some woodcutters hacking away on the large trees, cutting out one of their slash-and-burn fields that were so plentiful in the mountainous areas

of Laos. They returned to the hill by noon.

Son and Sau searched for several hours before spotting some trackers. Shortly after seeing them, Sau and Son heard the dogs and returned to the hilltop.

Sau felt it was only a matter of time before the trackers pinpointed us and so he urged moving. Ten minutes later we were heading down the backside of the mountain. After descending about 1,000 feet, we moved west, back toward the direction we had come from. During our travels we crossed several trails that weren't on the map but were heavily used.

At last light, we found a series of huge boulders that were reminiscent of Stonehenge in Britain. There were limited entrances into this rocky area and no one could launch a mass assault against us if they pinpointed us.

About midnight, ST Idaho was collectively shocked out of its sleep when we heard barks from what sounded like the largest dogs in the world.

Before moving out of the RON at first light, Sau reinforced the eastern entrance to the stone area with mines and pepper.

Spider was overhead early and I told him we wanted to be extracted ASAP. After getting a fix on our location — Sau climbed a tree and flashed a mirror at him — Spider pointed us toward an open area big enough for an extraction.

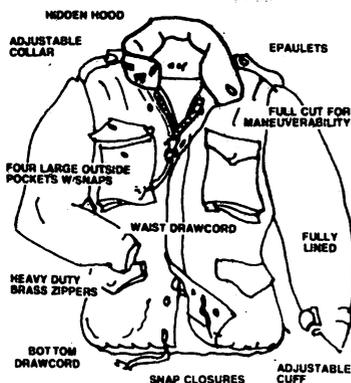
He returned in 30 minutes with bad news:

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Because the weather had finally broken, S-3 at Phu Bai ordered him to insert another spike team before they extracted us.

A few minutes later, we heard two mines explode at our RON site. It felt good to hurt Charlie with his own tactics.

By 0900 we had located the LZ and secured it. As we heard the dogs again, I learned that another spike team had declared a Prairie Fire emergency after making contact with the NVA. They had casualties and needed an immediate extraction. Meanwhile, the other ST was inserted.

I sent Sau and Son back down our line of march to the LZ and had them set up some more mines.

By 1100 hours the other team had been extracted and Spider was overhead, taking ground fire from north of the LZ. When the first Marine Corps' UH-1B gunships arrived, I worked them north of our LZ. They each took several hits. When the A1E Sky-raidiers made passes, they also took hits from small arms fire that sounded like AK-47 rounds. During the second A1E gun-run, Sau ignited the first claymore in the face of an NVA scout. Sau blew the second claymore and returned to the LZ, reporting more NVA troops right behind him.

King climbed a rock and pumped out six quick rounds of HE toward the area the NVA were in. Shore and I fired HE rounds from our sawed-off M79s. The 40mm barrage slowed the NVA troops long enough for the extraction ships to come into the LZ.

And for our first time, slicks from the 101st Airborne Division extracted us from our target. We were used to Kingbees and knew most of the pilots on a first-name basis.

The 101st pilots were good, too. They came right in. Fortunately, Spider had alerted us about the slicks and I told Shore and King that they had to be the first people to approach the ships. I would not send any of our little people to the ships until they had alerted the doorgunners to the fact that five of our men were South Vietnamese.

The extraction was quick. We took several hits on the way out. As we pulled off the ground, the area north of the LZ lit up with dozens of flashes from AK-47s and SKSs. As the gunships laid down final suppression fire during our extraction, the windshield was blown out of one aircraft and the second chopper took more than a dozen hits.

When we got back to FOB #1, a major from S-3 chewed me out for panicking and asking for an extraction. I explained about Lane; I told him about the NVA that were closing in on us; the number of hits the gunships took on extraction; my broken, painful tooth; the fatigue of our team; the joy of being socked in for five days; and that we could have had at least one NVA POW had Mother Nature cooperated.

He didn't care. He gave me a new target for the next day.

I went back to my room and picked up a newsmagazine with a picture on the front page about the latest anti-war protests stateside.

Insane.

Whose side were they on? They didn't get to see Charlie like ST Idaho had.

I went to the dentist, got my tooth pulled, drew new rations and PRC-25 batteries.

The next day, ST Idaho got shot out of five LZs. ✕

COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

Continued from page 27

tween the thumb and forefinger at the serrations just in front of the hammer. (The shooter should now be aware of the shadow of the gun just below eye level as he focuses on the target.) The next step is to *push* the pistol forward, rather than pulling the slide back, to chamber the round. After the round is chambered, the master hand will be forward of the weak hand with sights vertical at *eye* level. To assume the shooting position, simply move the weak hand forward and place it over the master hand.

Because the weapon is already at eye level, instinctive shooting is much easier to perform. This technique is effective and, to my knowledge, the Israelis only teach two-handed instinctive shooting.

Obviously, this Israeli pistol training policy differs drastically from the various shooting techniques practiced in the United States. Though this insistence on a single system might seem overly rigid, there are two very favorable consequences of it that have been borne out in practice. The first is commonality of technique. This is important operationally because when Israelis from disparate services or backgrounds get together for a mission anywhere in the world, they can rest assured that everyone has been trained in the same technique. The second is a complete trust in their system. The high success rate of Israeli military operations undoubtedly is due in no small part to their weapons handling techniques.

In comparison, we *gringos* employ many different weapons and techniques in the military, FBI, local law enforcement agencies, IPSC and so on. With so much being so different it's hard to present a common-front approach as the Israelis consistently do. The Israelis are convinced theirs is the only viable technique for them and they don't shy away from exporting it.

Now that I've discussed the Israeli pistol-shooting technique from their point of view, I will share some personal observations about it and then present a modification which I think makes it even better.

One of the technique's weak points is that, after pushing the pistol forward and loading the first round, the hands



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are a considerable distance apart, with the strong hand outstretched and the weak hand near the chest. This weak hand, then, has to play "catch up" in order to form the two-handed grip before shooting. Because of this, a loose weak-hand grip usually results, hindering the shooter's ability to control recoil and muzzle jump.

Another drawback is that the shooter can't adequately address close-range targets (arm's length or closer) because before you can shoot, the weapon must be brought almost to eye level to chamber a round, and both arms must be extended to form the two-handed grip.

So I figured out what I think is a better way to execute this technique and overcome these drawbacks. Here's how:

Instead of loading at eye level, I find it easier to load at waist level. To do this, immediately after drawing the pistol rotate it 90 degrees so that the slide is facing inward. With your forearms parallel to the ground and the pistol at waist level, grasp the slide between thumb and forefinger of the weak hand and push the pistol forward with the master hand as in the above scenario, thereby chambering a round. (Do not try to "help" the slide forward with the weak hand! It's very important to release the slide completely after it has traveled to its rearmost position, allowing the return spring to pull the slide forward under its own power and chamber a round properly.)

If the target is close, the shooter merely swings the elbow of his master arm down to his hip and assumes a perfect hip shooting position. If the target is farther away he can assume his two-handed hold. This loading technique has an added advantage in that it is easier to shoot from the Weaver stance since the weak hand can find its proper position before the weapon is brought up to eye level. This ensures a stronger, more stable grip which reduces felt recoil and muzzle climb.

All in all, the no-round-in-the-chamber option is the safest method of carrying an auto loader, and in many ways it is a wise alternative technique for military personnel. For while competitive shooters can fire many thousands of rounds and gain complete familiarity with their weapon, soldiers only have limited ammunition and therefore require a technique such as this that is safer, even if it does sacrifice a few tenths of a second in speed. And even though the Israeli system is somewhat slower, you'll be surprised at the speed you can attain after a little practice.

Though I don't use this technique because thousands of rounds of ingrained habit prevent my so doing, I could use it if I had to and I can definite-

ly teach it if required. I'm convinced that all pistol shooters should at least be aware of this Israeli technique and familiarize themselves with it.

And the technique works. It worked for Saul and hundreds of others caught in what might otherwise have been a no-win — and deadly — situation. ✕

SALVO FTX

Continued from page 59

By midnight all the teams had slipped into our position, being very careful not to disturb our friend above us. All radio traffic was sent in shackle code and we changed it every six hours. With no aggressive activity from the Gs we felt fairly safe in giving the teams our location and telling them about our friend.

We had collected a huge amount of information on this area and were sure we had found a large G camp that had not been detected before. We still had not been able to reach Ilopango, so they knew nothing about what was going on or the fix we were in.

We reached our extraction point about 0500 with no problems. The sergeant major made it OK but was hurting pretty bad by the time we got there. After checking out the area we settled down to wait for our ride. At 0600 we came up on the air and tried to contact the base again. No luck. We then went to the chopper frequency and waited. By 0800 we were starting to get real worried. By 0900 we had decided it was time to try something new.

The base has an emergency frequency that is supposed to be monitored 24 hours a day and we all agreed that this was an emergency. We put the frequency on the radio and after about six tries we got an answer. The commo man at the base was very leery of our transmission and wanted confirmation. Our call sign was not on his list of units out. We were told to go to another frequency. This was done and when we called them they answered right back.

We asked them where our ride was and what was going on. He wanted to know our position and he would get someone there to pick us up. By 1000 hours the area was alive with people and still no choppers in sight. We had decided to wait 30 more minutes and then get back the best way we could on our own. At 1015 we saw a lone chopper heading our way. We came up on the air and sure enough it was for us. But why only one? We told the pilot we were two o'clock from him about 500 yards out and asked whether he could see our panel. He came back and said that was a roger and for us to pop smoke.

I really didn't want to pop smoke. Hadn't they told him this could be a hot

ANOTHER PEACETIME CASUALTY

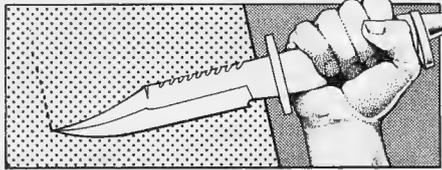
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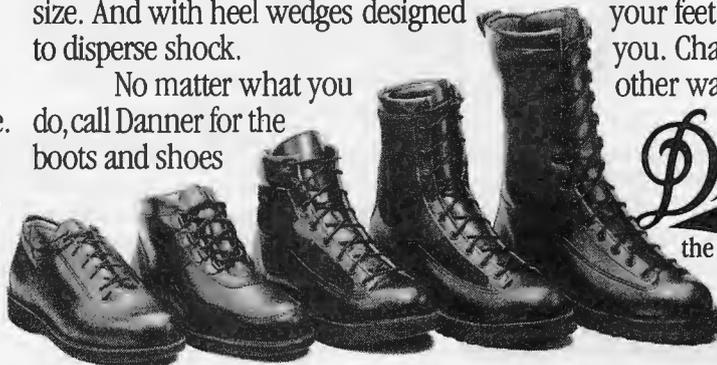
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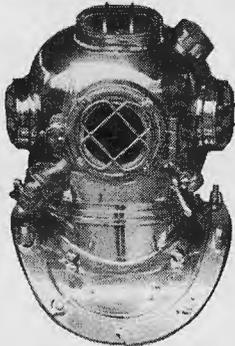


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LZ? About a hundred yards out we popped yellow smoke. He came back saying he had seen yellow. We confirmed and he came in. By this time everyone in the area had seen the chopper coming in and the yellow smoke. We could see several people moving to the tree lines. As the first team was loading I jumped in and got the surprise of my life. The pilot and copilot were Americans.

The pilot was one of the American chopper instructors and the other was Max Gomez, a retired CIA man who worked with the Salvo air force. Their big grins soon turned to big worry when I told them they'd landed right in the middle of a shit house full of Gs. I asked them where the rest of the choppers were and they said this was it. I bailed out of the bird and they were off.

We pulled our perimeter closer around us and sat down to wait. Coming toward us on two sides of the clearing were armed Gs, but they were being cautious. In about 15 minutes we saw the chopper coming back. This time it came in low and fast. Our next team was ready and as soon as the chopper hit the ground they were on it, along with me. The sergeant major had insisted I go out with this lift. He did not want a *gringo* with the final group if they were captured.

The Gs were hiding from the chopper and had not opened fire. Why? We had one more load on the ground and it didn't look good. When we reached the base the chopper didn't even put down. We jumped out from about five feet and he was off. We hooked up with the first load and waited for the last lift. In about 15 minutes we could see the lone chopper coming in. They had made it.

A lot of questions had to be answered by someone and I was in no mood for niceties. When the last load was off the chopper, we counted noses and I told the sergeant to take the men to the debriefing room. I guess I did not have a happy face when I started into the operations room and was stopped by the MILGP commanding officer (CO). He told me to report to his office, now.

As the sergeant major and I dumped our gear on the floor and got cups of coffee the CO told us what had happened. We had gone out on an FTX in what was thought to be a stable area and the air force did not know we were in trouble. They were aware that we were to be picked up this morning, but all the Salvo pilots were busy with other things and they had no one to come get us. It was only an FTX and we were way down on the list of things to do that day.

When the airborne had called over to flight operations they didn't tell them we might be in trouble. The only reason we got the chopper we did was because the instructor happened to be in the room when the call came. Since there was no one else to pick us up, he volunteered.

Max had offered to ride along.

When I settled down the CO asked me what was going on. I gave him a brief account of what we had found. He got on the phone to the base commander and asked him whether he would like to sit in on a debriefing from a unit that had just come in. By the time the debriefing started the room was packed with brass.

The young Salvo sergeant gave the debriefing and did a fine job. Later I talked to the CO of the Airborne Battalion about our commo problems and was told the commo center had been given the wrong frequency for our FTX and he had not been told of our failure to contact the base. I told him part of it was my fault for not going by the commo center and making sure they had the shackle codes and frequency we were to use. He congratulated us on a job well done and asked me to file a full report with him with suggestions on how not to let something like this happen again.

Acting on the information we gave them, the Airborne Battalion launched an attack on the area the next week. They found a G hospital with large amounts of medical supplies and a large supply dump. There was also a printing shop and passports of Europeans from half a dozen countries, all from the communist bloc. Not bad for something that started out as an FTX.

We finished up the training cycle the next week and saw with satisfaction the first FAC teams go operational in El Salvador.

We took the sergeant major over and had his foot X-rayed and there was nothing broken, just a bad sprain. As we sat in the "O" club that night, the American pilot came in and had a drink with us. Several drinks, in fact. We all knew today had been a close one. ✕

GENERAL SAFI

Continued from page 69

SOF: I have heard of people going back into areas the mujahideen control.

SAFI: Of course, a lot of the country is in the hands of the mujahideen. I can show anyone that we control much of the country. But not the big cities in the daylight.

But now, because the threat of Soviet air superiority has decreased, we are using the crafts, agriculture.

SOF: That should cut down the problems you have feeding troops operating inside.

SAFI: Of course, of course.

SOF: Was there any change in Soviet tactics this year?

SAFI: As a military professional, I really don't understand. The activity of their Spetsnaz decreased. The aircraft flights decreased. They didn't make the

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effort to establish posts to cut our supply lines this year. I really don't understand them, so I don't know how to give you a proper answer.

What will happen in the future I can't tell you. But this year they were not very aggressive.

SOF: Has the new Soviet puppet ruler in Kabul had any impact on the situation?

SAFI: Najib? His reputation is much worse than Babrak Karmal's [the Afghan ruler removed in 1986]. He was, after all, in charge of the KHAD [Afghan secret police] and killed a lot of innocent people. He is only in power because of the pressure of *jihād*. These poor guys are nothing. They are just the pieces of chess playing. They come and go.

When they are alive, when they are in power, they are the Russians' *tavarishch* [comrade], their friend, their brother. When they are taken out of power, they are killed as agents of the CIA. That is the easy way.

SOF: Is Karmal alive?

SAFI: There is some doubt. Some of the intelligence we have received indicates he may be in Russia, other reports say he has been shot.

SOF: The creation of the seven-party resistance alliance was hailed as a major step forward in 1984. Is it working out?

SAFI: They are getting closer to making a constitution for the alliance. It is good if we can do that.

SOF: Is there a chance the fundamentalists, moderates and monarchists will actually produce one government document they can all agree to?

SAFI: This is the choice of the people. We are fighting for the people of Afghanistan and we want to have a government which is the choice of the people. But not extremes. There is no place in Afghanistan for extremes.

SOF: Has Salwar Nouristani [an important regional chieftain in northeastern Afghanistan allied with the Kabul regime] made the reconciliation program more successful in his area?

SAFI: From the beginning he was a communist agent. He tried to distribute weapons to some unaligned tribes to win them over, but last year in June two of our NIFA commanders stole his weapons, more than 400 Kalashnikovs. So far he is not having success. He was trying to close the Chitral route in the north but has not been able to do so.

SOF: Are all your supply routes open now?

SAFI: Everywhere. You can go from the border to the end of the north by vehicle.

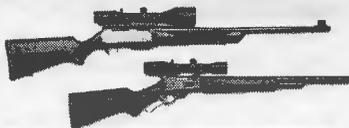
SOF: How much of Kandahar is under the control of the old man now?

SAFI: You mean Haji Latif, the Lion of Kandahar? He has all the city day and

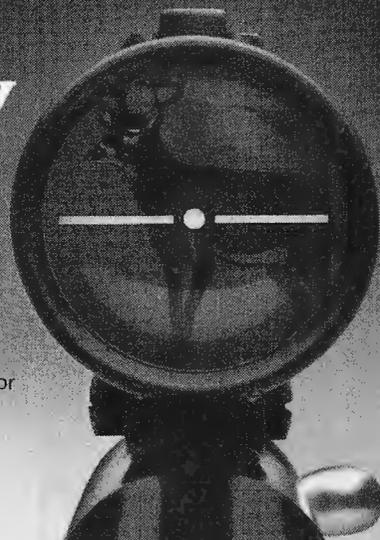
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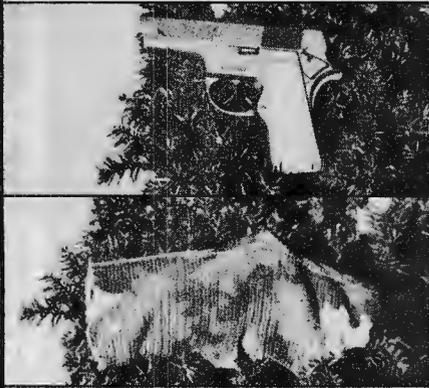
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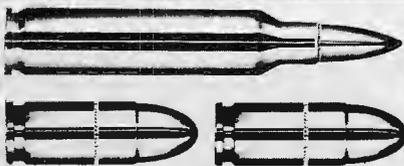
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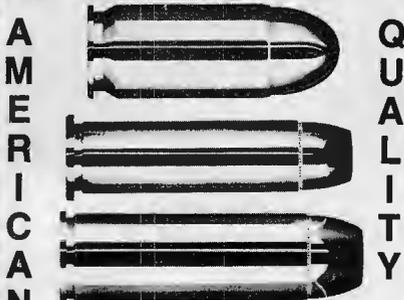
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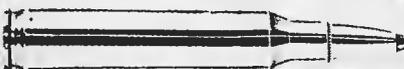


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night. This is the only big city that is open day and night for the mujahideen.

SOF: He's what now, 76?

SAFI: Yes, he's an old, good man. You know, it is funny how war changes reputations. In the old days, before the war, I did not like this man. [Latif commanded a heavily armed band of raiders that controlled the caravan routes — and all criminal activity in south central Afghanistan.] But when the communists came he put aside his previous activities and became a very effective commander.

SOF: After eight years of hard fighting, how is the morale of the mujahideen holding up?

SAFI: I think once you have no choice, no alternative, morale will be high. And when you are fighting for the right purpose, your morale will always be high.

SOF: Even though you have lost a lot of good commanders and one million killed?

SAFI: The thing is, the old die but the young grow up and join the mujahideen. The commanders? Believe me, it is really funny. Yesterday's schoolboy is today a general in the Pamir on the Sulaiman Mountains. Sometimes you have trouble understanding: Only the day before he was a young boy, today he commands a thousand mujahideen better than I could, better than any of us could. Instant generals. But some of those young boys have been fighting for eight years.

I am the professional, educated in Afghanistan, the founder of the commando forces and the founder of the mountain troops; educated in the Soviet Union, Spetsnaz; educated in England; educated in the United States, Special Forces, and believe me they are much better than me. It is magic I don't understand. Combat is a good teacher.

SOF: When the minister of information threatened in 1984 that any Western journalists captured inside would be put on trial as spies and executed, it had a chilling effect on coverage of the war. Have the journalists started going back in?

SAFI: This is funny. They said if they caught the journalists, they would kill them. To do that they have to kill us first. The country is 80 percent open. We are walking freely. They can't move outside their bases.

It [getting killed] might happen, it is war. There might be a sudden attack, an artillery shell that could kill you. But to capture you alive? Out of the question. But if you go by yourself or with the government, those journalists we don't care about. Some of the Westerners you can't believe. They come from a democratic world and some of them are communists or socialists and what they do or what happens to them is their business.

SOF: There have been reports of serious trouble in Pakistan between the Pakistanis and the Afghans. Why?

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SAFI: That is a very good, fine question. In your own family, if your brother comes to your house and stays for one week, then you might become bored and say, "For God's sake, leave my house." That is part of the problem. Pakistan itself is poor and overpopulated but with a very big heart. We have the help of the Pakistani people and the Pakistani government and sincerely we are grateful to them. But remember one thing: It might be that the Russians are bad in technology, but they are very good in their KGB, their secret police and their spies. You can see in Europe their activity. There must be some KGB involvement in the trouble in Pakistan.

SOF: Who is responsible for the bombing incidents that have occurred in Peshawar?

SAFI: The KGB. They will strike, penetrate inside Pakistan and try to upset the people by exploding bombs in Peshawar or other towns. And they will strike against the mujahideen leaders. I am not surprised because that is in their nature. Because on the ground, the actual fighting, they are inferior.

SOF: How goes the war in the west?

SAFI: Very good. Everywhere it goes well. There is no difference in our weapons now, and that has made the difference. Before we were better armed in the south and east. Now it is the same everywhere.

SOF: What needs and goals do you have for 1988?

SAFI: One: Active air defense systems. Two: Effective ways to cross the Soviet mine fields. Three: Long-range radios for communications. Four: Long-range, portable heavy weapons to hit their hearts in difficult places.

SOF: Could a major city like Khost or Jalalabad fall to the mujahideen in the near future?

SAFI: It all depends. They are human, we are human. If you take away their superiority, then we can do the job. I am positive. I was not positive in 1986. This year I am.

Even now the Russians cannot fly into Jalalabad. Did you hear in Khost there were two or three aircraft full of officers that were shot down recently?

SOF: Is there a chance you could run them short of food and ammunition this winter?

SAFI: They are short now in many places.

You know what we are doing now? I give you an example from Kunar. In Kunar there are three main bases. All seven parties of the mujahideen have told the commanders there to make a plan for sequential attacks. Today NIFA attacks, tomorrow *Jamiat* attacks, the third day *Hezb-i-Islami* attacks, the fourth day *Harakat*. All seven parties, every day attacks to keep on continuous pressure. They are already crying in many places. ✕

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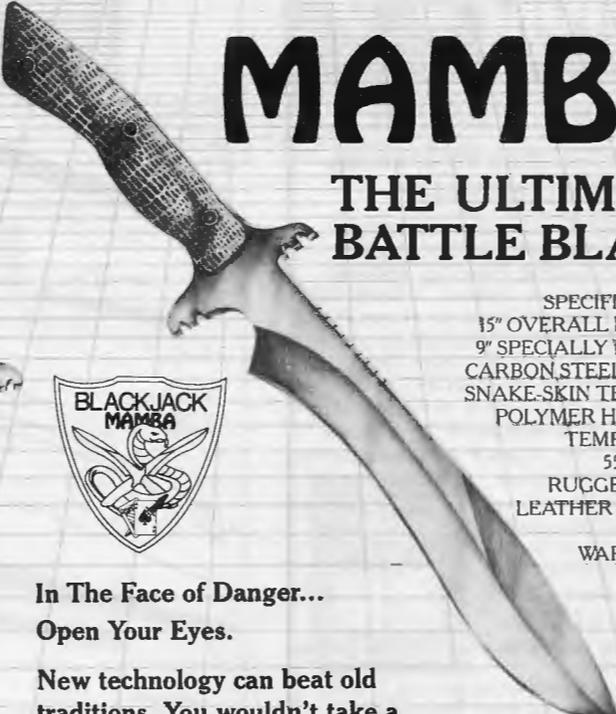
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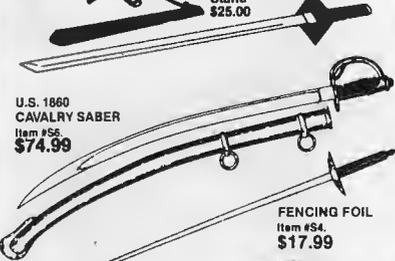
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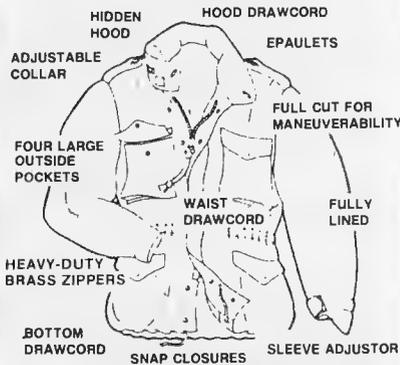
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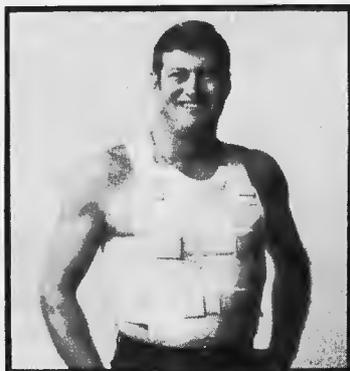
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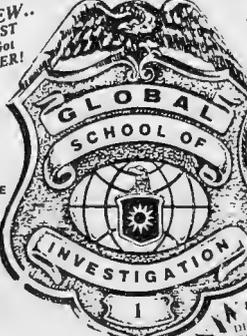
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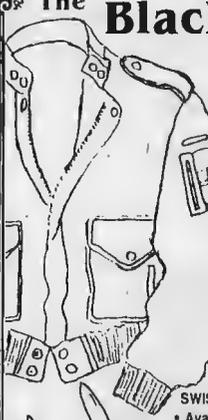
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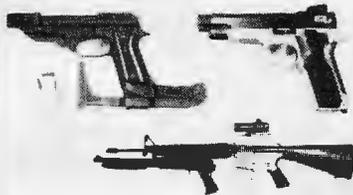
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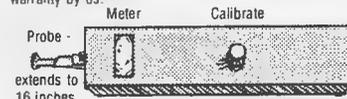
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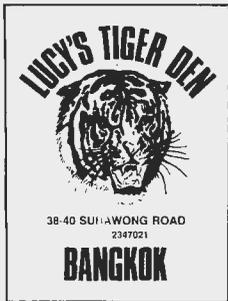
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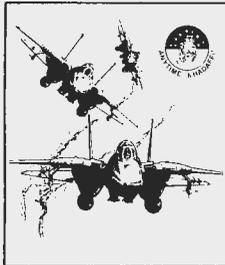
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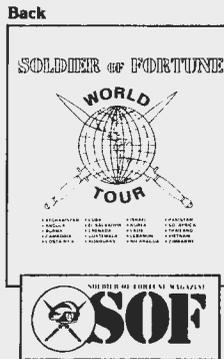
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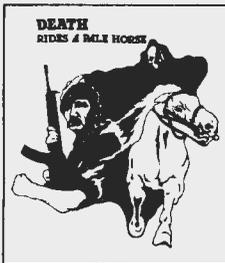
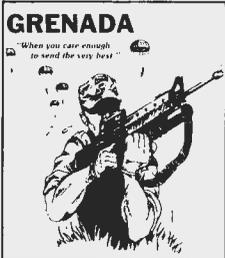


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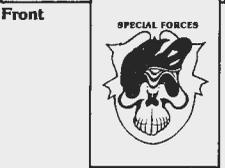
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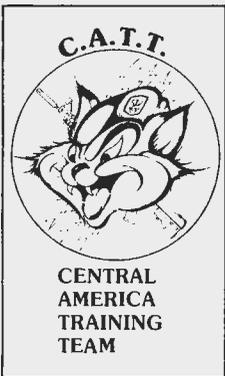
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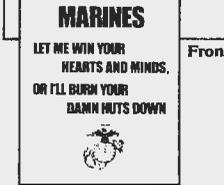
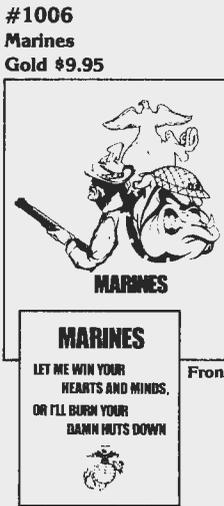
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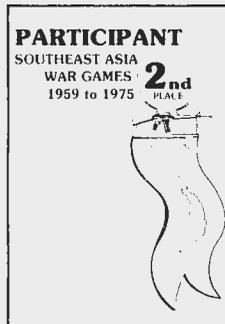
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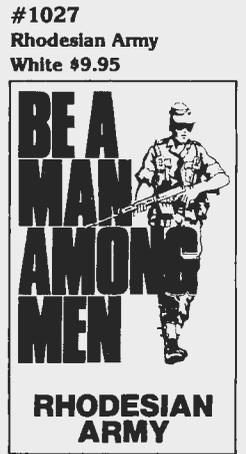
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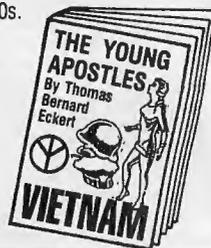
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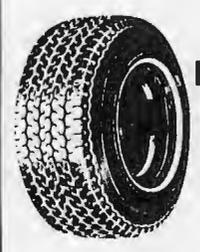
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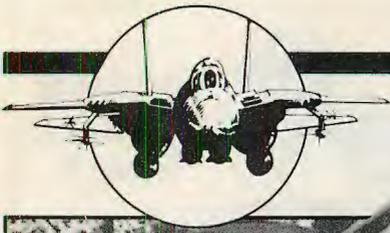
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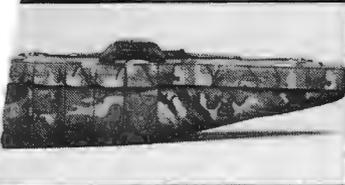
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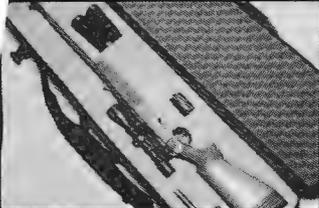
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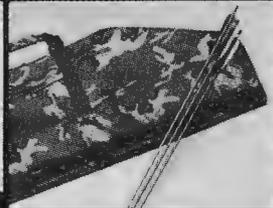
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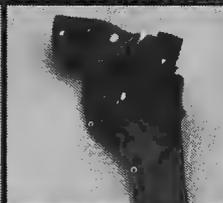
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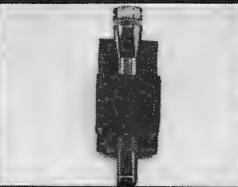
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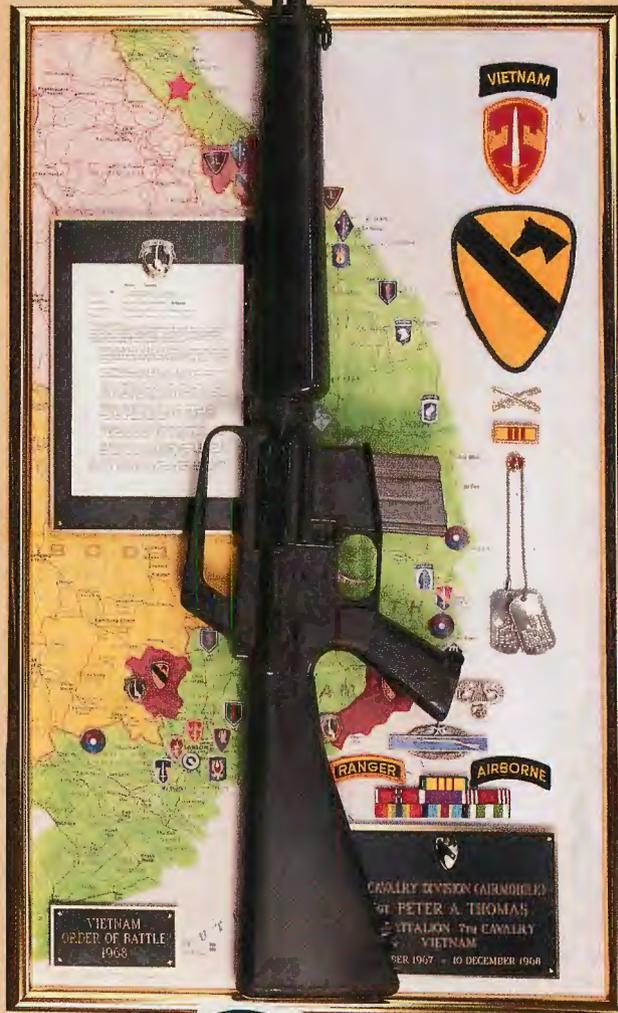
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